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ANALYSIS

Kokang: For Myanmar and China, this time it's different

GUY DINMORE
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THE last upheaval that changed the balance of power in the small, rugged area of northeastern Shan State on the border with China was dubbed the "Kokang Incident". The Tatmadaw swiftly took control and appointed a new administration. Refugees returned, while Myanmar's close economic and political ties with China resumed their upward trend. That was in 2009. This time threatens to be different - not just in the intensity of fighting that erupted on February 9, possibly involving several rebel ethnic groups, as well as the scale of the refugee exodus and reports of numerous civilian casualties. The use of social media to spread propaganda by all sides also adds a new dimension to the conflict, while the Myanmar government, which has imposed martial law in the area, has rejected calls from the Kokang rebels and China for ceasefire talks.

Fighting in Kokang has entered its third week and casualties are mounting daily. The Tatmadaw says it has lost at least 55 soldiers, while claiming to have killed more than 70 rebels of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army led by Pheung Kya-shin, an 85-year-old warlord fighting to re-establish his grip over the border zone after being driven out six years ago.

MORE ON NEWS 12

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A worker from the E-Land factory speaks to reporters during a protest in Shwe Pyi Thar Industrial Zone on February 26. Labour activists say recent disputes in Yangon industrial areas are largely the result of problems with labour laws, which are being openly flouted by both workers and employers.

PHOTO: AUNG HTAY HLAING

Alcohol pulled from shelves

Major retailers have responded to warnings from the authorities that a crackdown on illegal imports is imminent by removing stock from shelves and issuing a fresh call for changes to the government's broken import policy. BUSINESS 26

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Page 2

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



THE INSIDER: The local lowdown & best of the web

HAPPY PEASANTS' DAY!!!!

No joke

A press stringer from Monywa was taken in during the wee hours on the morning of Friday, February 27, for an in-jest Facebook post that Special Branch apparently didn't find particularly amusing, deeming it to be in breach of sections 5(a) and (e) of the Emergency Provisions Act [Burma Act 17, 1950] – making him the first to have been arrested since the declaration of martial law in the Kokang conflict.

Photographer Aung Nay Myo made a joke about the conflict in Kokang, likening it to an historical event known as the "40-day battle of Kunlong" and casting it as though it were an upcoming movie production. He joked that the feature would be produced by President U Thein Sein, with the story by former dictator Than Shwe and the script by the erstwhile Senior General's wife, Kyaiing Kyaiing. He also made a play on the word Kunlong and the fact that it sounds a little bit like "condom".

A document outlining the charges surfaced online, signed off by Monywa Special Branch officer Myin Lwin. The law reads thus:

'Whoever does anything with any of the following intent; that is to say; a) to depreciate, pervert, hinder, restrain, or vandalise the loyalty, enthusiasm, acquiescence, health, training, or performance of duties of the army organizations of the Union or of civil servants in a way that would induce their respect of the government to be diminished, or to disobey rules, or to be disloyal to the government; [...] e) to spread false news, knowing, or having reason to believe that it is not true'

Ethnic cause taken up in WA

Renegade West Australian MP Luke Simpkins has followed up on his recent self-funded visit to the Thai border and Karen resistance-held territory inside Myanmar (a bit of a diplomatic no-no) with a strongly worded speech imploring that sanctions ought to be considered, as he's not convinced of the sincerity of the reform process.

Simpkins, who has a large Karen and Chin population in his constituency (West Australia being the highest concentration of Myanmar refugees in the country), was inspired to visit Karen National Day and spent some time with the Free Burma Rangers – a responsive-but-somewhat-militant missionary outfit who see to it that abuses around the country are documented as best as possible, and provide aid through their Backpack Medic program.

While he certainly made some valid points (and some glaring errors with regards to the constitution of the hluttaw), he also made the all-too-common mistake of painting all ethnic armed resistances as a rag-tag bunch of freedom fighters who've never been

implicated in forced labour, human rights abuses, rape, drug-running or the planting of landmines in civilian areas. He made the case for greater diplomatic engagement by the Australian embassy, and highlighted the need for an improved dialogue between ethnic minorities and the central government.

Following his visit to Karen State, and perhaps inspired by the resistance, Simpkins initiated the spill motion that threw Australian politics into disarray and that the country's walking punchline of a prime minister narrowly survived.

Naked sexy dance called off

Zar Zar Htet, a celebrity whose profession is described as "sexy model", has refuted rumours that suggested she intended to perform a "naked sexy dance" as a morale-booster for Tatmadaw troops. She took to her Facebook page to dispel the claims, the source of which was not entirely clear. She did, however, make a public donation to the families of those who had lost loved ones in the recent Kokang conflict.

In brief*

Egregiously hammy acting style widely deployed in Myanmar soap operas traced back to one washed-up, expressive Italian drama coach

Tour de Bago cancelled

Explanation as to why Pheung Kya-shin's public statements have been in the third person proves elusive; "Even Pheung Kya-shin does not know," said Pheung Kya-shin

Tourist basing itinerary around guide to Yangon's "counterculture" published in *The Guardian* last week somewhat disappointed by 50th St; "It's not... it's not very edgy"

Next week*

Expat columns threaten to march on Sule from Yaw Min Gyi and Golden Valley as City Mart pulls booze from the shelves; "This is like the Tonic Crisis of 2012 all over again," said one man

Local winemaker named "The Face of Buddhist Terroir" by *Grapevine Magazine*

China's one-year ban on ivory imports "could" impact Mong La trade, but "probably won't", say observers

Cigarette brand ups ante in battle of promo girl hemlines: deploys knees

*not true

Emergency Provisions Act [Burma Act 17, 1950]

Once was Burma...

Archival material courtesy of Pansodan Gallery

First floor, 286 Pansodan, upper block, Kyauktada township



A-thet (Alive) Magazine reflects on the true meaning of the holiday.

Tourists say the darndest things

"One could sit sideways across a mat and scrunch your legs to brace against the opposite side. This was uncomfortable as there was no back support and I could not twist around to see what was being pointed out in the direction of my back. I ended up sitting backwards, and this was dreadful. I had to hold on tightly with both hands because the carriage tilts backwards and you bounce over lots of ruts."

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Residents of Katha smash their mobile phones, in an apparent act of protest at MPT's coverage. Photo: via Facebook

Fog of war shrouds truth on civilian casualties



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CONFLICTING accounts are emerging of atrocities against civilians in Kokang during three weeks of heavy fighting between the military and ethnic Chinese rebel forces in the self-administered border area.

Independent verification of claims by both sides has been hampered by continued clashes and several attacks, sometimes by unidentified gunmen, on Red Cross and civilian convoys. Media access to the region, where President U Thein Sein imposed martial law on February 17, has been tightly controlled by the Tatmadaw, as well as by Chinese authorities on their side of the rugged border following an exodus of tens of thousands of mostly ethnic Chinese civilians.

Pictures posted on February 25 on Weibo, a popular Chinese microblogging site, purport to show volunteer workers in the main town of Laukkai collecting mutilated and bloodied bodies of men in civilian clothing and cremating them on makeshift pyres made of rubber tyres and wood. At least three of the men had their hands bound with rope behind their backs. Official Chinese censors quickly deleted the posts.

Speaking to *The Myanmar Times* by telephone from just inside China, a woman who said she worked for the volunteer association, but did not take part in the operation, said the photographs were genuine and that the group had collected and disposed of 11 bodies in the town. She said she did not know who had killed the men, but that some of them had last been seen dragged from their homes by the Tatmadaw. "They were civilians," she said, asking not to be identified. She said that a 10-year-old boy had also been killed by a landmine.

U Zaw Htay, director of the President's Office, denied military responsibility for civilian deaths in the area. "Government troops did not attack innocent civilians," he told *The Myanmar Times*.

He accused rebels of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) of infiltrating the region

and pretending to be civilians. The pictures posted on Weibo were anti-government "propaganda", he said. "As you know they [the MNDAA] have prepared systematically to launch this military offensive. So they are ready to make propaganda that the government is killing civilians when the Tatmadaw attack them."

The MNDAA issued a statement on February 25 urging refugees who had fled to China not to return to their homes, accusing government troops and police of killing people suspected of being rebels. The rebel group, fighting to reclaim territory it lost to the Tatmadaw in 2009, has accused the military of killing more than 100 civilians.

Meanwhile, the Shan Human Rights Organisation accused soldiers of looting homes in three ethnic Shan and Palaung villages near Laukkai over the past week. The villages had

'[The MNDAA] are ready to make propaganda that the government is killing civilians.'

U Zaw Htay
President's Office

been largely abandoned by their inhabitants with most fleeing to China, leaving behind mainly elderly people to look after their homes, the group said on February 27.

It quoted villagers from Goong Sar and Na Sai as saying Tatmadaw troops had burned down sugar-cane fields to prevent Kokang rebels from hiding there, causing large financial losses as the fields were about to be harvested.

Despite these reports, the army-run *Myawady* newspaper said on February 26 that "stability" had been restored to Laukkai and local people were returning to their homes. It said 1314 people had gone back from February 22-24 and were welcomed by the army and local authorities with "noodles, soft drinks and snacks".

MORE ON NEWS 5



Workers from the E-Land Myanmar factory protest in Shwe Pyi Thar Industrial Zone. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

Protests highlight labour law shortcomings: activists



NYANN LYNN AUNG NOE NOE AUNG

LABOUR groups have blamed weaknesses in the legal framework for an outbreak of protests at factories in Yangon that has resulted in confrontations between workers and police.

While most workers from five strike-hit factories in Yangon industrial zones have agreed to return to work, some remain on the picket lines.

Ko Aung Thu of the Myanmar Trade Union Federation (MTUF) said the Settlement of Labour Dispute Law was unable to resolve the current problems.

"Laws that were enacted ... cannot protect the workers. Not only are workers losing their rights but owners are also having problems too. These laws cannot solve [disputes] or protect both sides from losses," he said.

On January 28, workers from the Red Stone, Costec, E-Land Myanmar and Ford Glory garment factories and Tai Yi shoe factory - located in the Shwe Pyi Thar and Hlaing Thar

Yar industrial zones - went on strike, issuing a range of demands to factory owners.

While these varied between the factories, all groups sought a K30,000-a-month pay increase.

On February 17, the Yangon Region government attempted unsuccessfully to negotiate with the workers, and three days later they sent police to close down the strike camps.

However, the intervention resulted in violence between police and striking workers.

U Maung Maung Win, a lawyer who sits on the Arbitration Council created under the Settlement of Labour Dispute Law to resolve disputes, said both workers and employers regularly violated provisions of Myanmar's labour laws with impunity.

"It's rare for them to obey the laws. This is why the worker protests are still happening," he said.

MTUF president U Aung Lin said that based on the cases the federation has been involved in employers are more likely to violate the law than workers. However, he called on both sides to respect the rules.

"Even though there are problems with the law, we would like both

sides to obey it and to negotiate. If not, things could get worse," said U Aung Lin.

He also said knowledge of the laws needed to improve.

"For example, [workers] have the right to demand a salary increase, but how should they go about doing it? It's possible they could break the law if they do it the wrong way."

Ko Naing Linn Aung, an activist involved in the dispute resolution process, said that workers from three factories had reached a settlement with their employers and planned to return to work.

Others - in particular workers from E-Land garment factory - remain on strike.

"Today, about 160 workers went back to their factories," he said. "But the protests started with a large number of workers. After the fight with the police, many went back to their villages. Around 200 are still protesting," he said.

On February 24, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association and the Yangon Region government issued a statement on the strikes, warning that they would negotiate but also take legal action in cases where the law has been breached.

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Mandalay uni stops politics lecture

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MANDALAY University authorities last week cancelled a planned presentation by a prominent foreign journalist just an hour before it was due to go ahead.

Former British Broadcasting Corporation journalist and political analyst Larry Jagan had been scheduled to give a presentation on political reform in Myanmar at 3pm on February 24 at Inwa Hall on the university campus.

The talk, which was to cover this year's election, the constitution, the future of the presidency, peace talks with ethnic groups and religious conflicts, was cancelled at 2pm by the university's rector.

A meeting with political science students from the university was allowed to take place as planned at 5pm.

Mr Jagan was previously on a government blacklist but has in recent years been able to visit Myanmar regularly.

He told *The Myanmar Times* that he did not know the reason for the cancellation.

"You would have to talk to the rector about why he cancelled it," he said.

"We saw [a similar case] with the Irrawaddy Literary Festival [in 2014 when] the central government says yes [but the] local authorities say no.

"There are differences within the government hierarchy and it [takes] time before this changes. I don't see it as censorship; it is a bureaucratic matter."

One of organisers of the talk, who asked not to be named, said he believed the incident would damage the image of Mandalay University.

Political science student U Win Aung, who attended the 5pm event, said he was impressed by Mr Jagan's comments, particularly his suggestion not to expect too much from the 2015 election due to Myanmar's lack of experience with democracy.



Land cleared for a palm oil plantation project implemented by a Malaysian company. Photo: Wa Lone

Peace brings plantations and displacement in Myeik hills

WA LONE

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VILLAGERS in a remote and mountainous part of Tanintharyi Region are claiming compensation from a joint venture company running a palm oil project on land they say was confiscated from them.

The Kawutt-Kawmabyin area is more than 40 kilometres (27 miles) from Myeik and 80-km (50 miles) from Tanintharyi township. Much of the area, including the farmland, was abandoned during the fighting between Tatmadaw forces and the Karen National Union that ended with a January 2012 ceasefire.

But as peace allowed the former residents to return home, large investors in search of land for plantations came too.

Malaysian-owned Myanmar Stark Prestige Plantation (MSPP) launched an oil-palm project on more than 17,000 hectares (42,000 acres) in the area in 2011, investing US\$36 million over a 30-year contract. The joint

venture is 95 percent owned by Malaysian Prestige Plantation and 5pc by Stark Industrial Myanmar.

But a group of villagers says the land belongs to them, and the company has paid no compensation.

In January, residents from 14 villages near the project wrote to Vice President U Nyan Tun, chair of the National Resource Management central committee, the KNU and the regional authorities.

Ko Myint Naing, 34, a resident of Bawsanway village, said 28 acres of hillside land was confiscated and areca, cashew and palm trees cut down. "The company didn't pay any compensation to us, they said they'd got permission from Nay Pyi Taw to implement their project," he said, adding that his parents inherited the land, but had no legal documents.

Bar Soe Tae, a priest in Thara Bwin village, said the lack of legal documents was common in the area, and many farmers did not even know the exact size of their holdings. "We had enough land for all the villagers. But the company grabbed the land and we lost our future," he said.

MSPP planted 385 acres in 2012, rising to 2221 acres in 2013, and expects to



A resident of the Kawutt-Kawmabyin area who lost land to a palm oil project. Photo: Wa Lone

occupy 25,000 acres by 2018.

U Aung Min Thu, MSPP general manager in Myeik, insisted the land belonged to nobody before the company came and accused 88 Generation and National League for Democracy members from Myeik of stirring up trouble in the area.

"We have had no problems with the residents for the past four years," he said, adding that the value of land had risen since the company built a 44-km road connecting the area with

Tanintharyi and Myeik.

Saw Myint Soe, the chief of Their Byin village, said that in addition to their claim for compensation, they wanted the company to stop expanding their plantation, and to provide more information about its plans. "We don't know anything about the company and they didn't explain us about their projects," he said.

Daw Mya Thida, managing director of Stark Industrial, said villagers could have objected when the company began the project, but had failed to do so. "We agreed in the MOU that the government had to provide the land without objection," she said.

Foreign investors could be discouraged if issues of this kind were not resolved, she added.

The situation bears many similarities with cases throughout the country in which farmers complain that the authorities have confiscated their land, often for large-scale plantations, and demand either compensation or restoration. U Myint Sein, an expert in legal matters concerning land ownership, said the law provided little protection to villagers in this situation. "They have no hope of getting back their lands if they have no legal documents," he said.

OMI continues freedom of information push

OPEN Myanmar Initiative (OMI) will continue to press for a freedom of information law, its spokesperson said last week. On February 28, OMI was to host a workshop at Yangon's Orchid Hotel for representatives of non-governmental sectors on the issue.

"Civil society organisations and NGOs will attend. There will also be representatives and experts on specialised fields, who have been individually invited," said OMI director U Aye Kyaw.

"We will host several workshops later this year to press for an FOI law ... We hope inputs from those workshops will support the emergence of an FOI law. People have the right to see official documents and information unless it is confidential."

At least two workshops would take place in March with the participation of government representatives.

"Members of the commission formed by the president will also participate in the workshops, as well as Ministry of Information representatives

and legal experts," U Aye Kyaw said.

"I think different expert points of view will help a lot."

OMI is a political research organisation affiliated to the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society. Last year, it released three reports on parliamentary activities.

The government has committed to joining a number of transparency initiatives, including the Open Government Partnership.

However, most observers agree it still has a significant way to go before it could be considered for membership. To be eligible for the Open Government Partnership, Myanmar needs to score 12 out of a possible 16 points across four criteria.

An OECD assessment carried out in 2013 pegged Myanmar's score at just two of 16 points. Both points were due to the enactment of the Anti-Corruption Law, which mandates the disclosure of assets by some government officials. - Lun Min Mang

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Students meet speaker as MPs ready for debate



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STUDENT leaders last week met Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann to discuss the timeline for the approval of changes to the National Education Law, amid a dispute with the ministry over differing versions of the draft amendments.

Student leader Ko Nanda Sit Aung said they requested the meeting because of concerns that parliament would not enact the bill in time to avert a possible clash between students marching from Mandalay to Yangon and police, who have warned the students to stay out of Myanmar's largest city.

The students could not be reached after the meeting, but Ko Nanda Sit Aung said prior to the talks that they were concerned the government and parliament were stalling on the promised changes.

The Amyotha Hluttaw announced on February 24 that it would conduct consultations on the proposed changes from March 5 to 15. Students halted their march on Yangon on February 18 but have said they will resume on March 2 if the law is not yet enacted.

"After we announced a date to resume marching, the hluttaw responded by setting dates to discuss the amendments. We think the government is prolonging the process and the hluttaw is also testing our patience," Ko Nanda Sit Aung said.

Earlier last week, student leaders accused the Ministry of Education of misleading the public by publishing draft changes to the education law that they say differ from amendments agreed on at four-way talks earlier in the month.

On February 19, state-run media published the current version of the National Education Law with two sets of the proposed changes: those put forward by the ministry, and those developed by student representatives together with U Thein Lwin from the NNER, Yangon Region Hluttaw representative Daw Nyo Nyo Thin and Ko Aung Hmine San of the Action Committee for Democratic Education.

Student leaders said the ministry had agreed to shelve its version at talks on February 14 that also involved MPs and the National Network for Education Reform.

"This bill was abolished at the four-party meeting because MPs said the hluttaw would not consider two bills



Students protest the National Education Law in Yangon on February 15. Photo: AFP

one from the four-party meeting and one from the ministry," NNER leader U Thein Lwin said on February 22.

The NNER and student leaders have sent letters of complaint to the ministry, parliamentary speakers, and local and international NGOs about the draft bill.

The differing amendment bills put forward by the ministry and the NNER are likely to delay the process, MPs said last week.

U Phyo Min Thein, a National League for Democracy MP, said the process could take up to one month if parliament needs to consider both drafts.

"While the NNER bill is based on 11 [main demands], it would change about half of the existing law," he said. "We also have to get feedback from ethnic minorities on the mother tongue sections."

Both bills share some similar features, albeit with different wording.

They both state that the National Education Commission will not exercise control over schools and universities, which will have the right to self-administration.

They also state that the government must ensure that the mainstream school system caters to students with a disability.

Students will have the right to choose subjects, aside from those required to pass the matriculation exam.

Students and teachers can also establish unions freely and will receive financial support to do so from university authorities.

Schools will be able to decide which language they use in classes, including English, Myanmar and minority languages.

The government will be required

to allocate at least 20 percent of the national budget to education within five years. The accounts of schools and universities will be subject to external audits under the draft changes.

CONTINUED FROM NEWS 3

The military has given scant information on civilian casualties in its accounts of the conflict, which have successfully stirred an unprecedented groundswell of popular support for the Tatmadaw despite its brutal record during more than four decades of military rule. In a rare admission of government losses, the Tatmadaw has issued almost daily reports of its own casualties, with four more deaths reported on February 26, bringing the total to more than 60. State media said the success of Tatmadaw operations had forced MNDA soldiers "to hide in jungles and mountains and ambush the Tatmadaw columns".

Matthew Smith, director of Fortify Rights, an NGO, urged the Myanmar and Chinese authorities to give unfettered access to aid agencies, journalists and others. He said the army has been involved in past atrocities with complete impunity.

"An impartial international investigation into wartime abuses in the ethnic states is long overdue," he said.

Accusations of civilian deaths come at a sensitive juncture in the Tatmadaw's efforts to normalise its relations with Western militaries and remove military sanctions imposed by the US and European Union.

US and Myanmar officials held their second round of "human rights dialogue" in Nay Pyi Taw from January 14 to 15. The US said it recognised the Myanmar government's "positive efforts to date" and that both sides agreed that "adherence to international humanitarian law is essential to a strong professional military that maintains the trust of the people".

"Both governments reaffirmed their obligations under the Geneva Conventions to protect civilian populations at all times and all places. Both governments discussed ways to work together to support security sector cooperation and reform," a US embassy statement said.

Explaining the Obama administration's decision to engage with Myanmar's military, a senior Pentagon official told a congressional sub-committee in December 2013 that US policy supports continued encouragement for reform and enhancement in the military's ability to respect human rights and civilian authority and control.

Vikram J Singh, deputy assistant secretary of defence for South and Southeast Asia, said the military in Myanmar remained critical to the ultimate success of government reform efforts and a full transition to democracy. - *Additional reporting by Kayleigh Long and Ei Ei Toe Lwin*

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Kokang on agenda at March talks

Myanmar Peace Center officials say representatives of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army will not be allowed to attend next peace meeting

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FIGHTING in the Kokang region between the Tatmadaw and a local ethnic armed group will be up for discussion at the next round of peace talks, but Kokang representatives will likely be barred from the talks.

The negotiations between the government's Union Peace-making Work Committee and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), the ethnic armed groups' umbrella, will resume next month.

Delegates from both sides agreed to negotiate at an informal meeting in Chiang Mai on February 21.

"We plan to meet from March 12 to 16 in Yangon," NCCT member U Khun Okkar confirmed.

Negotiators will focus on the few points not yet finalised in the draft ceasefire agreement which, if signed, would pave the way for political dialogue and ultimately an end to Myanmar's ethnic conflicts. Talks have been stalled since August against the background of a series of outbreaks of fighting.

The two sides also discussed the recent fighting in the Kokang region between the Tatmadaw and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

The MNDAA was the first ethnic armed group to sign a ceasefire with the previous military government. However, in August 2009, that ceasefire broke down as fighting between government troops and MNDAA forces drove thousands of refugees across the border into Yunnan province, China.

On February 9, clashes between the MNDAA and the Tatmadaw broke out again in Kokang as the MNDAA tried to retake the government-controlled Kokang self-administered zone, according to the government. Although

the MNDAA wrote to President U Thein Sein proposing a resolution through political means, the president publicly rejected the demand. He has since placed the region under martial law.

MNDAA is a member both of the NCCT and another ethnic alliance group, the United Nationalities Federal Council.

But U Hla Maung Shwe, a senior official with the Myanmar Peace Center, said the government would probably bar representatives of the MNDAA from attending next month's meeting, but that the Kokang issue would be discussed. "The MNDAA has never sent delegates to NCCT meetings, but the NCCT can

'We requested the government to ... resolve the situation through political means.'

U Khun Okkar
NCCT Member

negotiate with the government on their behalf. We understand the main task of the NCCT is to finalise the National Ceasefire draft," he said.

The UNFC, however, has urged the government to resolve the conflict through political means and not by launching a military offensive.

"We requested the government to recognise them as another ethnic group like us and resolve the situation through political means," U Khun Okkar said.

It also questioned the government's accusation that the MNDAA initiated the fighting.

"Most of the civilians who have died in Kokang are ethnic Kokang. That's why we believe that MNDAA did not launch this attack," the UNFC said in a statement.



Fireworks explode over soldiers from the Karen National Liberation Army's Seventh Brigade as part of celebrations marking the 66th Karen Revolution Day at their headquarters in eastern Kayin State. Photo: AFP

Union Day deal highlights deep rift in the Karen National Union

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CRACKS have once again emerged in the ranks of the Karen National Union as a result of the group's decision to sign the Union Day declaration on February 12. A delegation led by KNU chair General Mutu Sae Pho attending the Union Day celebrations in Nay Pyi Taw signed a commitment along with all the members of the government, including President U Thein Sein, in favour of establishing a federal system.

Allied groups, including the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Restoration Council of Shan State, also signed the commitment to build a system based on democratic and federal principles in the spirit of Panglong and in accordance with the outcomes of political dialogue.

But four days later, on February 16, KNU deputy leader Naw Zipporah Sein announced that the signing was not in accordance with the decision of the KNU Central Committee meeting held from February 3 to 7.

"KNU will have to resolve this organisationally," the statement said, adding that the KNU was committed to striving for the emergence of a nationwide ceasefire and political dialogue without delay. It said the KNU wanted to solve political problems by political means and through the establishment of genuine peace and a federal union.

Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, a

member of the KNU central committee who also attended the Union Day meeting, said that signing the commitment did not represent a deviation from KNU principles and policies.

He said Naw Zipporah Sein's announcement represented only her personal views, and not those of the central committee. He added that KNU would soon hold an executive committee meeting to resolve the issue.

The spectre of disunity first arose following the decision by the KNU to suspend its membership in the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an umbrella group representing a range of ethnic armed groups.

Though KNU chair General Mutu Sae Pho wrote to the UNFC announcing the suspension in August, Naw Zipporah Sein, the vice chair, indicated at the time that she would continue to take part.

"I don't want to say there are two groups in KNU, but there are two visions. The most important thing is how to better maintain solidarity among them," Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win said about the apparent split.

The issue has also spilled over into negotiations toward a nationwide ceasefire. The government has been in talks with the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, which is negotiating on behalf of 16 armed ethnic groups, since late 2013 in an effort to clinch a single ceasefire agreement.

However, observers say the KNU wants to sign an individual agreement

with the government, since it has better relations with Nay Pyi Taw than other NCCT members, such as the Kachin Independence Organisation and the New Mon State Party.

An official close to Nay Pyi Taw who asked not to be named told *The Myanmar Times* that some ethnic armies feel it is impossible to sign a nationwide ceasefire with the agreement of all armed groups represented in the NCCT.

"If the NCCT doesn't agree to sign the NCA by April, some members will probably sign individually because they want to start a political dialogue in May. They know the government can't wait any longer because of the upcoming general election," he said.

Another factor is that most armed groups have already concluded Union-level ceasefire agreements with government.

"But there has to be a nationwide ceasefire agreement because it will contain all the detailed military provisions," said U Hla Maung Shwe, an official of the Myanmar Peace Center.

Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo, noting that existing individual agreements do not contain a detailed code of condition for the military, confirmed that the KNU had no intention of signing an individual accord, even as it pressed for a political dialogue.

"KNU have no intention of signing an NCA alone in April," he said. "We will continue to cooperate with other members of the NCCT as much as we can."

MPs approve next round of \$700 million China loan

HTOO THANT

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SUCCESSING on its second try, the government persuaded has Pyidaung-su Hluttaw to accept a US\$300 million from Exim Bank of China on February 25, but only after lengthy debate. Parliament had turned down the loan at its last session, in part due to concerns about the interest rate and how the funds would be managed.

This is the second loan the government has accepted from China, and further loans totaling another \$300 million are expected, taking the total package up to \$700 million.

During a long debate, many speakers expressed reservations about it, in-

cluding the 4.5 percent annual interest rate. Many other foreign loans to Myanmar have been granted on concessionary terms, with little or no interest and repayment periods of up to 40 years.

Presenting its case, the Ministry of Cooperatives said the 10-year loan, which has a two-year deferment period, would help alleviate poverty and promote rural development.

But Daw Khin Mwae Lwin, MP for Minkin township, told the house that she was worried that poor management of the funds would leave the country in debt, with little to show for it.

"I'm worried that both the country and the public will struggle to repay the loan unless it's properly managed, so I oppose this proposal. But that doesn't

mean I don't wish to see farmers and low-income people borrowing money at low interest," she said.

She added that rather than default on their loans some cooperative association members had to borrow from illegal moneylenders at rates of interest as high as nearly 20pc a month.

Daw Khin San Hlaing, representing Pale in Sagaing Region, said the Chinese loan carried quite high interest and farmers were unlikely to be able to relieve their difficulties by taking out cooperative loans only. Recalling her opposition to an earlier application from the Ministry of Cooperatives for a \$100 million loan from China, she wondered whether the money would reach the farmers who really needed it.

U Win Myint, the MP for Myingyan, said rural people needed capital for their agricultural and livestock businesses, but faced a high rate of interest when borrowing. "This low-income group could benefit from a very low interest rate compared with that set by illegal moneylenders. They can reduce their burden of debt while raising their social status," he said.

But Minister for Cooperatives U Kyaw Hsan said he had sought the loan on the advice from the Union and state and regional governments. "Concerning this loan, I'm working honestly and transparently. I can take responsibility if there is mistake," he said.

The minister told hluttaw that \$220 million of the new loan would be set

aside for those unable to access cooperative loans, \$50 million was slated for loan extensions for current cooperative members, and the remaining \$30 million would fund a plan to sell agricultural machinery on instalment.

Under a preliminary agreement, China has agreed to lend Myanmar \$700 million, of which \$50 million was transferred in December 2013 and \$50 million more in April 2014.

U Tun Wai of the Pyi Kyaw Cooperative Association in Pinyinman said he had been told that the \$300 million would arrive in May. "The interest will be lower than the previous loan, so people can benefit if they manage their loans well," he said. - Translation by Thiri Min Htun and Zar Zar Soe

EXCLUSIVE

Thousands of birds culled after Monywa flu outbreak



PHYO WAI KYAW HLAING KYAW SOE



Thousands of chickens and quail were destroyed in Monywa. Photo: Phyo Wai Kyaw

POULTRY breeders have moved fast to control an outbreak of bird flu, state-owned media have reported. The chair of the Sagaing Region Livestock Federation said on February 26 that a special group had been formed to combat H5N1 in the Monywa Fowl and Quail Livestock Special Zone.

Dr Htein Lin said all infected birds had been destroyed, and controls had been imposed to keep suspect stock out of the market.

According to state-owned media, 10,023 quail had died as of February 25 and 23,000 were destroyed, while 1243 chickens died of the disease and 1488 more were slaughtered in the 55-hectare (134-acre) zone.

"According to our figures, there are more than 140,000 chickens in the zone, but we don't know the exact number of quail," said Dr Htein Lin.

"Not all farms were affected. Controls have been put in place to stop the spread of the disease, and no infected products will be put on sale outside the zone. The regional government is also involved, and we have released full details of our response. The situation is under control," he said.

Dr Htein Lin said authorities in the

zone were applying experience gained during H5N1 outbreaks in 2006 and 2010 in dealing with the current situation.

Dr Kyaw Htin, head of the Mandalay Region Livestock Federation, said fowl deaths outside the zone were due to Newcastle disease and respiratory ailments common at this time of year.

"There is no unusual H5N1 activity in Mandalay Region, and no humans in Monywa are reported as infected. Bio-security is the key to dealing with H5N1. Livestock products such as eggs, chicken meat and poultry guts

derived from illegal trade are dangerous, especially those coming from China," he said.

Chickens are mostly bred in Pathingyi and Madaya in Mandalay Region in more than 200 poultry farms, he said, adding that one possible source of infection was the practice of some chicken butchers to build temporary slaughter huts beside creeks.

"H5N1 genes are always changing. One day, we will have to adopt a closed-farm system for fowl and quail livestock," he said.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Spanish tourist tells of mugging ordeal

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A SPANISH tourist attacked on the outskirts of Bago last week has told *The Myanmar Times* he may have died had he not put on his helmet to deflect the blows of his assailants, one of whom was wielding an iron pipe.

Carlos Perez, 31, suffered head, arm and leg injuries in the attack, and also had a number of possessions stolen, although most were later retrieved by the police.

Mr Perez, who has visited more than 60 countries by bicycle over the past two-and-a-half years, said he was attacked while he stopped to cook food in a rural area about 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) outside of Bago on the evening of February 23. He had arrived in Myanmar at the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border crossing on February 21.

Mr Perez said that the two men, who appeared to be in their 20s, approached him while he was cooking food. They struck him over the head with an iron pipe, before kicking and beating him as he tried to escape on his bike.

"I would say the attack lasted about 20 minutes in total. It certainly wasn't short and during it I was able to get my helmet on to protect me. I think that might have saved my life," he told *The Myanmar Times* from his hospital bed on February 27.

He has since returned to Spain to receive treatment.

After the attack, the duo - one of whom Mr Perez said smelled very strongly of alcohol - fled with his possessions, including his bike, passport and cash. However, the police later retrieved the most valuable items, including some of the cash.

He was eventually able to get to the main road to flag down a driver, who took him to Bago Hospital, before he was transferred to Yangon General Hospital. After being rejected from two private hospitals due to the nature of his injuries, Mr Perez was eventually accepted by a third private hospital where he received treatment for injuries.

These included a head wound, broken fingers, two fractures to his left arm and a large gash on his left knee, which will require surgery to fix broken ligaments.

Despite the attack, Mr Perez, who remained in very positive spirits, said he holds no grudge against the country or its people.

"This could have happened anywhere. Unfortunately it did happen to me here, but the people here have been incredibly friendly and helpful, and even returned me most of my possessions," he said.

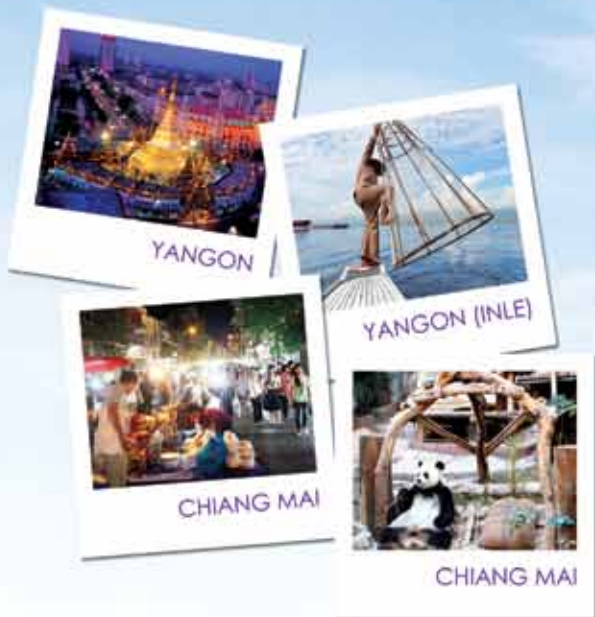
"I don't think they [the attackers] were professional criminals, they just lost control of the situation."

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LASHIO, SHAN STATE



Ko Zin Min Aung speaks to *The Myanmar Times* from his hospital bed in Lashio, northern Shan State, last week. Photo: Zarni Phyo

Migrant worker tells of Kokang kidnapping ordeal

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A MIGRANT worker captured by soldiers from an unknown armed group in the Kokang region managed to escape after being held at gunpoint and tortured. After reaching the Mansu Shan monastery in Lashio, which is sheltering hundreds of people made homeless by the fighting, Ko Zin Min Aung received medical treatment at Lashio general hospital. From his hospital bed he told *The Myanmar Times* about his ordeal.

'I saw no weapons, just the laser beam spots [on our chests]. They warned us not to try to escape, unless we wanted a quick death.'

Ko Zin Min Aung
Migrant worker

Could you tell us about your experience?

We fled from Laukkai because of the fighting. We had no money. Just after we had crossed Chinshwehah Bridge [on February 15], five men forced us to sit down and asked where we were from. They asked if we are from the government army, and we told them we were not. But they accused us of being soldiers and made us go with them. At first we were ready to resist, because there were eight of us and five of them. But then we saw the red dots of laser gun-sights on our chests.

On the way, they blindfolded us. When we reached their compound they offered us alcohol and asked again if we were soldiers. This time, they beat us when we denied it. They broke my arm by putting it between the fork of two posts. I don't know whether my friends are still alive or not.

What did the men who captured you look like?

They looked like Chinese people, with a fair complexion. They wore green uniforms without markings, but on their hats there was a kind of circle. They were not Myanmar soldiers, and they spoke with heavy accents.

What about their weapons?

I saw no weapons, just the laser beam spots. They warned us not to try to escape, unless we wanted a quick death.

How did you get away?

We managed to escape very early the following morning, at about 2am or 3am. When we asked for water, the guard who went to fetch it left the door of the hut open. All our other friends were asleep because they had forced them to drink alcohol and we couldn't wake them. So it was just the two of us who got away.

Do you know what happened to your friend?

He was beaten on the back of the head. While we were running, we saw the lights of cars and cycles behind us, and we were so scared we ran faster. But we got separated in the dark. I don't know if he's still alive. All I know is that he never made it to the Lashio IDP centre.

How did you reach Lashio?

I walked. It took nearly seven days. At night, I slept in the bushes. Then a truck picked me up and brought me here. When I reached Lashio township, an army captain gave me some money and a soldier brought me to the monastery.

Then I was taken to Lashio general hospital because of my broken arm. I had an operation ... to fix the broken bone together with metal plates.

What were you doing in Laukkai? How long were you there?

I'm from Tounggok township, Rakhine State. I've asked my family to come and get me. Since May last year I've been cutting sugar cane in Laukkai, earning K25,000 per day. But ... we can only work properly when the fighting stops.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

CHINSHWEHAW, SHAN STATE

Walking with

The formerly bustling border town of Chinshwehaw south



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CHINSHWEHAW was once a bustling border town, among the most prosperous crossings in the country. Today it lies almost deserted, abandoned by Chinese business owners and migrant workers fleeing fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army (MNDA).

Chinshwehaw is located just south of Laukkai, the epicentre of the fighting in the Kokang region. Other than ethnic Chinese, most of its inhabitants have come from elsewhere in Myanmar to work as sugarcane field workers and masons. Most of the cane plantations are run by Chinese.

Within two days of the outbreak of hostilities on February 9, trading halted. The workers fled to Lashio, the business owners to China.

When *The Myanmar Times* visited last week, warehouse, homes, restaurants and shops were empty and shuttered up.

"It used to be a beehive, but the war changed all that," said Daw Thi, who runs a Myanmar restaurant in Chinshwehaw.

"All the shops are closed and all daily necessities like food have to be bought in China," she added. The army denies reports that looting has taken place, despite the imposition of martial law. Corporal Khin Maung Lwin of the Myanmar Police Force insisted no such cases had occurred in any area under Tatmadaw control.

"Looting and stealing are happening only in Laukkai, but not in Chinshwehaw," said Corp Khin Maung Lwin. "A curfew is in force from 8pm to 6am. Anyone in breach of the curfew will be shot. This has happened in Laukkai."



The Chinese border gate in Chinshwehaw. Photo: Zarni Phyo

Teachers get help return

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TEACHERS who have fled the heavy fighting in Kokang are to be assisted to return to their home towns, the Ministry of Education announced last week. U Tin Myo Kyi, director general of education for upper Myanmar, said on February 23 that the teachers would also be paid a two-month salary advance.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled the fighting in the Kokang border region as Tatmadaw troops battle the ethnic Kokang Myanmar National



Some of the few remaining residents in Chinshwehaw.

The few people remaining in Chinshwehaw don't wait for nightfall, but cross the border into China



The Chinese border gate in Chinshwehaw. Photo: Zarni Phyo

Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA). The government has imposed martial law in the conflict area.

The education ministry is working with regional governments as well as the ministries of health and social affairs, and donors to help the teachers return home. The ministry will contact them again so they can go back to work when the situation normalises.

"We can't hold exams in Laukkai because of the fighting, and all this coincides with the school holidays, so we decided to send them home," said U Tin Myo Kyi.

ghosts on the border

of Laukkai has been deserted by Chinese traders and Myanmar migrant workers alike



shwehaw walk past shuttered homes and shops in the mostly abandoned border trade town. Photo: Zarni Phyoo

to put up at hotels in the town of Mein Tein. "We come back into Myanmar during the day," said Ma Myint Hla, who said the immigration procedures are much stricter on the Chinese side.

At the Nant Mar Phaw Bridge border crossing, the gateway into China, heavily armed Chinese soldiers scrutinise every vehicle.

Only three or four military personnel are posted on the Myanmar side to check people going in and out.

Residents said they were concerned that the light military presence could make Chinshwehaw a target for insurgents.

"Chinshwehaw is under military rule, but we don't see strict immigration checks being carried out. We're told Chinese mercenaries were involved in the fighting in Laukkai, so why are immigration procedures so relaxed? Our citizens could be at

risk," said Ko Min Aung.

Like the trading businesses and restaurants, all schools in Chinshwehaw closed shortly after the fighting.

The Ministry of Education has made alternative arrangements for students from the town's high school to take their matriculation examinations elsewhere. "Advance payment of salary for one month has also been arranged for teachers," said U Tin Myo Kyi, managing director of No 2 Basic Education Department.

But the exams will not be easy for those displaced. Ko Myat Min, 14, who has taken refuge in Mansu Shan Buddhist monastery, Lashio, with his family, said he had had to leave all his books behind in the rush to escape the fighting.

"This exam was very difficult for me because I can't study for the exam," he said. "But I will try hard to pass it for the sake of my parents."

The Mansu monastery has taken

the majority of refugees from the Kokang region who have fled inland, rather than over the border.

Camp registrar Ma Mee said that as of February 24 some 3000 people had taken refuge at the monastery.

"The pace may be slowing, but about 200 people are still arriving every day," she said.

The fighting Laukkai has had a deeply chilling effect on what was an economically vibrant region, particularly compared to Myanmar's rural areas. Many who fled to Lashio told *The Myanmar Times* that they just want to get back to work.

"Normal trading could resume if the two sides agreed to cease fire," said U Myo Min, officer-in-charge of the border trading station at Chinshwehaw.

Given the government's firm rejection of a February 16 offer for peace talks, that seems an unlikely prospect.

arning home from Kokang region

Civilian workers have come from all parts of the country to work in Kokang. There are 863 school teachers working in Laukkai. The Ministry of Education will designate two sites in Lashio and Kunlong for students who took refuge from the fighting to sit their exams.

U Win Hlaing, Mandalay Region's minister for social affairs, told *The Myanmar Times* on February 23 that 240 teachers fleeing the fighting had arrived at Mandalay Region's Education College. "Some are in poor health, so we have provided medical treatment.

'We've been stranded in Lashio for 13 days ... I just want to get back to school as soon as possible.'

Daw Than Htay
Laukkai high school teacher

We're also providing bus tickets to get them back home," he said.

The teachers are from Sagaing, Mandalay and Magwe regions. Those who have difficulty getting home will be offered temporary accommodation at nearby military compounds.

"We've been stranded in Lashio for 13 days. There are other civil servants still there. The schools are closed because of the fighting. I just want to get back to school as soon as possible," said Daw Than Htay, a 10th standard teacher from No 1 High School in Laukkai. - Translation by Zar Zar Soe

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Kachin murder investigation team to seek UN participation



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THE Kachin Baptist Convention plans to ask the United Nations to join its team investigating the rape and murder of two female volunteers in northern Shan State in January, a senior official said.

On February 5, the KBC formed a 15-member committee, comprising legal experts and Christian leaders, to monitor the work of a government-appointed investigation team.

The KBC plans to expand its team to include members of the Lawyers' Network, women's groups and the Kachin Peace Network, Reverend Samson Hkalam told *The Myanmar Times* on February 24. It will also write to the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights inviting it to join the team.

The KBC will hold a meeting in Mandalay on February 27 to discuss the issue further, including whether to write to President U Thein Sein requesting the government not to place



Rev Samson Hkalam of the Kachin Baptist Convention is calling for UN help to investigate the murder of two women killed in Shan State. Photo: Zarni Phyo

pressure on the investigation team.

Rev Samson Hkalam said the KBC is also suspicious of the results of DNA tests conducted by the government team that appear to clear Tatmadaw soldiers of involvement.

According to Rev Samson Hkalam,

the government team said during a meeting with the KBC in Muse on February 20 that DNA taken from the crime scene had not matched any members of the 503rd Light Infantry Regiment, which was stationed in Kaung Khar village when the deaths

occurred on January 19. It also did not match samples taken from residents, he said.

The investigation team could not be reached for comment on February 25.

"We don't believe the DNA results because this was checked by the Criminal Investigation Department and the government can change the results easily. We want the DNA to be checked in a foreign country," Rev Samson Hkalam said.

The government investigation team has said it suspects two residents of Kaung Khar may have been involved in the murder. However, Rev Samson Hkalam said the KBC believes they are innocent and is concerned of them being wrongfully convicted.

So far it has attempted to shield the pair from interrogation because it fears they would be tortured to extract a confession.

"The two residents told us that they didn't commit this crime," he said.

Two female volunteer teachers, Maran Lu Ra, 20, and Tangbau Hkwan Nan Tsin, 21, were raped and killed in Khaung Khar village on January 19. Their deaths sparked widespread outrage and accusations that Tatmadaw soldiers were responsible.

IN BRIEF

Court sentences 15 for attack on Muslim buildings

Fifteen people have been jailed for their role in an attack on Muslim buildings during last year's religious conflict in Mandalay, but a lawyer says the organisers of the attack remain at large.

Patheingyi Township Court on February 24 sentenced two people to two years' jail for the attacks on the buildings at the cemetery in Patheingyi township on July 4. Another 13 were jailed for one year for insulting religion.

But the defendants' lawyer, U Thein Than Oo, said those sentenced were "just minions" and the organiser of the incident remains at large.

"We have found out there is a leader behind them. The most important culprit is missing," he said.

The buildings were targeted in apparent retaliation for the July 2 murder of Ko Tun Tun, a volunteer for the Free Funeral Service Society from Patheingyi township. The incident occurred shortly after Ko Tun Tun's funeral.

About 40 people have been jailed for their role in the July 2014 unrest, which also resulted in the death of a Muslim man. - *Maung Zaw, translation by Khant Lin Oo*

Secretariat rooms to be renovated, opened to the public

Sections of Yangon's colonial-era Secretariat building linked to Bogoyoke Aung San will soon be opened to the public. The independence hero's office and the room in which he was assassinated, as well as the building where sessions of parliament were once held, will become a museum.

Deputy Minister for Construction U Soe Tint told the Amyotha Hluttaw last week that both citizens and foreigners will be allowed to visit.

Yangon Region Government and Anawmar Art Group, which won a 2012 tender for the building, signed the property lease contract on January 29.

In accordance with the agreement, the company will accept the supervision of the Myanmar Investment Commission and the suggestions of the Yangon Heritage Trust, to develop the museum sites in line with the building's Conservation Management Plan.

The original style of the building will be maintained. - *Pyaë Thet Phyo, translation by Thiri Min Htun*

Koh Tao trial expected to drag on through 2015

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THE Koh Tao murder case will last at least until September, a labour rights activist assisting the defence team says. Two Myanmar migrant workers, Ko Zaw Win and Ko Win Zaw Htun, are charged with the killing of two British tourists on the island last September.

Now the court is scheduled to hear witnesses from the Thai government in July, and testimony for the

two accused in September, says U Htoo Chit, a spokesperson for an investigation team formed by the Myanmar embassy to assist the defence.

"I've visited the two workers in prison and I believe they are innocent. The strongest case against them is for illegal working status. For this [offence] the sentence should be only one or two months," he said.

The first court hearing took place on December 26, with 65 witnesses, mostly police and Thai government officials, plus six Myanmar migrant

workers. There are 31 defence witnesses, including two foreigners.

The victims, David Miller and Hannah Witheridge, were killed on September 14 on a beach on Koh Tao, a small island in the Gulf of Thailand. Thai police initially arrested three Myanmar migrant workers on October 1, two of whom confessed. DNA samples taken from the two suspects reportedly matched DNA found on one of the deceased. However, the suspects later recanted their confessions amid allegations of

torture by the police.

The speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw, U Khin Aung Myint, has tried to secure the release of the two suspects, but under Thai law foreigners cannot provide bail.

The Myanmar embassy investigation team has discovered more defence witnesses who had not come forward earlier, however many of these are reluctant to testify because they were working in Thailand illegally at the time of the murders.

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CONTINUED FROM NEWS 1



GUY DINMORE

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The picture on civilian casualties is unclear. Photos posted on February 25 on Weibo, the Chinese microblogging website, purport to show the bodies of several people in civilian clothes being collected by volunteers in the streets of the main town of Laukkai and burned on pyres. Chinese censors quickly deleted the posts, illustrating the government's sensitivity over inflaming public opinion amid reports that the Tatmadaw has been responsible for the deaths of some ethnic Han Chinese citizens. The Tatmadaw has tightly controlled media access to Laukkai.

The ethnic issue resonates heavily in China, with Pheung Kya-shin apparently adept at using social media and even interviews - since deleted - with the official *Global Times* appealing to nationalist sentiment for support. China's official media says more than 30,000 refugees have crossed the border seeking safety, while unofficial estimates have put the figure much higher.

The Kokang rebels and the majority of the civilians in the area belong to China's ethnic Han majority, some claiming lineage back to the last remnants of the Ming Dynasty army that fled to Burma in 1659. In the early 1950s nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) troops took refuge from advancing Communist forces in Shan State where they received covert US support and prospered from opium and other sources of smuggling. Even recently, KMT flags could be seen flying above Kokang villages while Laukkai, in the words of one foreign aid worker,



Peopled displaced by the Kokang fighting sit and stand in a Lashio monastery where they sought refuge. Photo: Zarni Phyo

became a cesspit of Chinese brothels and gambling dens fuelled by a trade in methamphetamines, which had overtaken opium as the drug of choice.

Other ethnic rebel groups in Myanmar have also sought to capitalise on the conflict by portraying it as an anti-China conspiracy by the United States. This message is likely to resonate among Chinese hardliners, who fear a US policy of containment that has benefited from the gradual normalisation of relations between the US and Myanmar since President U Thein Sein's reformist government took office in 2011.

Yun Sun, an analyst at the Stimson Center, a Washington think tank, noted that Gam Shawng, the commander of the Kachin Independence Army, had given an interview to China's *Global Times* saying it was "no coincidence"

that the Tatmadaw's offensive came while senior officers in the US Defense

'For China, the strategic importance of Burma significantly outweighs China's interest in the border ethnic groups.'

Yun Sun
Stimson Center

Department were "secretly" meeting the Tatmadaw in Myitkyina.

This was echoed by Pheung Kya-shin, who said the Myanmar military was serving "American strategic interests" in the border region. Ms Sun said the reports "quickly went viral in Chinese cyberspace", even though the US officials were in Myanmar for the second round of a human rights dialogue.

The Obama administration says it is deeply concerned by the fighting, and like China has called on all sides to exercise restraint and return to a dialogue.

The consensus among China analysts is that Beijing, which denies backing the Kokang, will not allow its broader strategic interests to be derailed by the ambitions of an ageing drugs kingpin. But there are also doubts over the central government's capacity to get to

grips with a distant and complex crisis. "For China, the strategic importance of Burma significantly outweighs China's interest in the border ethnic groups," Ms Sun said, noting the importance of oil and gas pipelines and new trade routes linking China to the Indian Ocean and South Asia. Myanmar, she said, was a "priority country where China strives to restore influence, repair ties and mend its damaged reputation".

But the scope and depth of China's involvement in a possible peace process will be limited, she said. "The reason is not just the [official] non-interference policy, but how the involvement will backfire in Myanmar on China."

There have been no reports of high-level meetings between Myanmar and Chinese officials over Kokang, although Ms Sun said she believed there was constant contact through embassies.

Bernt Berger, an analyst with Stockholm's Institute for Security and Development Policy, notes that Beijing has repeatedly stated its wish to play a constructive role in Myanmar's national reconciliation and economic development. "But no matter what Beijing does to signal good intentions, on a local level the capacities, skills and willingness to implement these policies are lacking," Mr Berger wrote last week.



"Beijing has done little to defuse suspicions and nervousness among Myanmar officials and the public," he wrote, referring to cross-border support for the Kokang and Wa rebels.

This is amplified by Pheung Kya-shin's history of being backed by Beijing during the Burma Communist Party's incursion into northeast Myanmar in 1968. "The experience of a small state being trapped in great-power calculations," Mr Berger wrote, "still resonates among Myanmar's leaders."



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Tatmadaw soldiers stand guard between Kunlone and Nant Tee on the road between Lashio and Laukkai on February 21, shortly after an ambush by unknown attackers that left one government soldier dead and two injured. Photo: Zarni Phyo

NAY PYI TAW

Panic as army press gang rumours spread

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POLICE have denied rumours that army press gangs are forcibly recruiting men and boys as military porters to serve in the fighting against the Kokang armed group headed by Pheung Kyar-shin. Despite the official denial, the rumour was rife in Nay Pyi Taw and other parts of the country last week.

Some men are even reportedly climbing trees to avoid being inducted.

The stories began following a February 21 press conference about the fighting in Laukkai, northern Shan State, and spread rapidly. The next day it was circulating in Pyinmana township.

An instructor who runs a computer class in Nay Pyi Taw's Lewe township told *The Myanmar Times* that many of his students left class early to go home "because they said the government was recruiting porters on the roads to the villages".

Daw Khin Win of Aye Chan Thar village tract in Lewe said the rumour had also spread in her area. "No one knows exactly where it came from. We heard that people in Yeni, Bago Region, had been forced to serve as porters," she said. "In our village, the men and boys stay off the streets after dark."

Police Colonel Zaw Khin Aung, deputy head of Nay Pyi Taw Police, acknowledged the rumours, but said they were not true.

"We go to the villages and explain the real situation. No such labour force exists. The Tatmadaw aren't doing that now," he said.

But U Phar, who runs an agriculture and livestock business in Pyinmana township, said, "Men from the village hide in my banana plantation at night because they don't want to be forced to act as porters in the war. They say some men climb trees to hide there."

Pol Col Zaw Khin Aung dismissed the reports, saying they made no sense.

"Who would dare to recruit porters in Nay Pyi Taw, an administrative town? It's not like the army were doing it in the countryside, where it would be harder to deny. People should not spread these rumours in time of war."

Human rights activists have long accused the Tatmadaw of recruiting local civilians for dangerous work as military porters during the country's decades-long ethnic conflicts.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Shan army urges president to open Kokang peace talks

Shan State Army-North also joins other armed groups in denying support for ethnic Kokang rebels



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THE Shan State Army-North has written to the government urging it to open talks with Kokang rebels, as the death toll continues to rise following more than two weeks of heavy fighting in northeastern Shan State.

In the February 23 letter, the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) also refuted Ministry of Defence allegations that it was supporting the ethnic Kokang Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army (MNDAA) in the conflict.

The letter said the government should solve the "political conflict" through talks rather than violence, and urged President U Thein Sein to "build mutual respect" through ceasefire talks with the Kokang group, which is led by Pheung Kyar-shin.

The government has already rejected peace overtures from the MNDAA, after the group wrote to President U Thein Sein on February 16.

The Shan State Army-North letter was sent two days after a senior Tatmadaw officer told reporters in Nay Pyi Taw that the MNDAA had received assistance from other armed ethnic groups both before and during the offensive it launched on February 9.

Lieutenant General Mya Tun Oo accused the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDAA-ESS) - better known as the Mong La group - the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Shan State Army-North of involvement.

He also said that Chinese mercenaries had assisted the Kokang armed group.

With the exception of the TNLA and the Arakan Army (AA), all groups have denied the accusations.

U Lah Nan, a spokesperson for the KIA, told *The Myanmar Times* that while there had been fighting between Kachin and Tatmadaw soldiers in recent weeks it was unconnected to the Kokang conflict.

125

Approximate number of Tatmadaw and ethnic soldiers killed in the Kokang conflict to date, according to state media

"Like us, the Kokang are fighting for their rights. But I strongly deny [the accusation]. We neither have a connection nor affiliation with that armed group," he said.

On the other side of the battle

lines, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) has scotched rumours it had dispatched units to the Kokang region to fight alongside the Tatmadaw. It issued a statement on February 24 saying it had no soldiers in the Laukkai area.

Last week, Pheung Kyar-shin also denied that there were any Chinese citizens fighting against the Tatmadaw.

In a telephone interview with the state-run Chinese tabloid *Global Times* that was quoted by Reuters, he said that the "the Kokang side has strictly forbidden Chinese citizens from entering Kokang to join the MNDAA".

"We will not accept Chinese citizens participating in armed actions as this is only harmful to us," he said.

"[A]s soon as Chinese law enforcement agencies discover that on our side there are Chinese citizens joining battle, they would give us enormous pressure. So our principle is not to allow Chinese citizens to fight."



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Freedom brings little respite for former political prisoners

A new survey has found unemployment and chronic health problems are rampant among ex-political prisoners



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THEY endured years of imprisonment – and, in many cases, torture – for their political beliefs, before being released amid government reforms. But thousands of former political prisoners in Myanmar are still suffering, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), due to financial hardship and poor health.

The group has accused the government of failing to provide any support to thousands of former political prisoners, many of whom have been released in amnesties since 2011.

The AAPP's Documentation Project says 7000 to 10,000 former political prisoners are mired in financial hardship, and in some cases are homeless, jobless and without access to badly needed medical and mental healthcare.

The figures are based on a nationwide survey the AAPP is carrying out in conjunction with the Former Political Prisoners Society and the University of California, Irvine.

"Until now, no one knows exactly how many former political prisoners are in Burma, what difficulties they are facing or what they experienced as prisoners," said AAPP director U Bo Kyi, a former political prisoner.

The project's interim findings released on February 23 revealed that 74 percent of former political prisoners experienced physical torture, while 76pc experienced some form of mental torture while behind bars.

Almost half of respondents reported being beaten, while others endured cigarette burns, electric shocks, sexual abuse and being hung upside down from the ceiling.

In addition to the abuse, the former dissidents were subjected to squalid living conditions. Some were forced to drink toilet water – when they were permitted to drink at all.

As a result of abuse inflicted during their incarceration, former political prisoners reported experiencing



Naw Sang, an ethnic Kachin political prisoner, sits in the office of the Former Political Prisoners Society in Yangon on July 23, 2013, after he was released from Insein Prison in an amnesty. Photo: AFP

a long list of ailments: hypertension, eyesight problems, heart disease, chest and back aches, paralysis, and anxiety.

"The majority of the [former political prisoners] ... have yet to receive adequate, or any medical attention," said the interim report.

74%

Former political prisoners surveyed who experienced physical torture

Depression is also common, according to U Bo Kyi, who was imprisoned for seven years after participating in the 1988 student uprisings.

"After they were released, former political prisoners found their

families didn't understand what had happened to them," he said. "Society had changed and they had no regular income and in many cases no way of getting a job, making them feel useless and unwanted."

Almost one-fifth of surveyed dissidents reported unemployment, while three-quarters said their income was insufficient to provide even basic subsistence.

Rather than provide support, however, the government is more inclined to put former prisoners under surveillance, U Bo Kyi and other former political prisoners said.

"They are afraid we will do something political, that we will organise against them again," said a former political prisoner who was involved in the 2007 Saffron revolution, and who asked not to be named for safety reasons.

While the number of political prisoners has fallen significantly since U Thein Sein came to power, more continue to be imprisoned each month, in what rights groups are referring to as "hostage

swapping". Some are being convicted under laws enacted by his government, including the peaceful protest law.

AAPP counts 177 political prisoners currently behind bars, while another 213 await trial, despite a government assurance that all prisoners of conscience would be released by the end of 2013.

"We can expect to see more political arrests this year ahead of the elections as there are more protests and the government is scared to lose," said U Bo Kyi.

In statements over the past month, Human Rights Watch said the new arrests undercut the "former pariah state's claims that it is genuinely reform-minded".

Presidential spokesperson U Ye Htut could not be reached yesterday, while Members of the Prisoner of Conscience Affairs Committee declined to comment.

Established in early January to recommend the release of eligible prisoners, the committee is still yet to meet.

IN BRIEF

AirAsia launches regional pass

Budget airline AirAsia last week launched two new products that it says will open up more than 100 Southeast Asian destinations to passengers from Myanmar. The two products, ASEAN Pass and ASEAN Pass+, offer access to more than 148 routes linking the 10 ASEAN countries at a steep discount to regular tickets.

"The pass allows us to bridge communities and attract more foreign tourists to the region," Air Asia Group chief executive officer Tony Fernandes said at the February 23 launch in Bangkok.

Passengers pay 5300 baht (K174,900) for 10 credits, to be used within 30 days of the first trip, or 9300 baht (K306,900) for 20 credits, to be used within 60 days.

Flights of less than two hours' duration are worth one credit, and flights of two hours or more are valued at three credits.

"We are working on additional enhancements to travel to non-ASEAN destinations," said Mr Fernandes.

The AirAsia Pass and ASEAN Pass+ credits are redeemable for travel with AirAsia Malaysia, Thai AirAsia, AirAsia Indonesia and Philippine AirAsia to ASEAN destinations only. – *Ei Ei Thu*

Schools should include housing for teachers: speaker

School buildings should include housing for non-local teachers, the speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw says. U Khin Aung Myint told parliament on February 23 that teachers often faced difficulty finding accommodation in their placements.

"It would be better if schools, especially high schools, were to include temporary accommodation for non-local teachers," he said.

U Khin Aung Myint said the education budget went on school buildings, furniture and office equipment. "The Ministry of Health provides housing for doctors, nurses and guards even in a 16-bed hospital. Why can't the Ministry of Education do the same in schools? I don't mean at once, but there should be a plan," he said. – *Pyae Thet Phy, translation by Zar Zar Soe*

Maritime Police to expand

Myanmar's Maritime Police Force is to be expanded to nine new locations, including Sittwe, Patheingyi and Kawthoung, a senior officer says.

Established in June 2012, the force currently operates in Yangon, Mandalay and Tachileik township in Shan State. Its main responsibilities are aiding victims of natural disasters, and preventing and suppressing piracy, human trafficking, the illegal drug trade, and the smuggling of natural resources and goods. – *Toe Wai Aung, translation by Kyawt Darli Lin*

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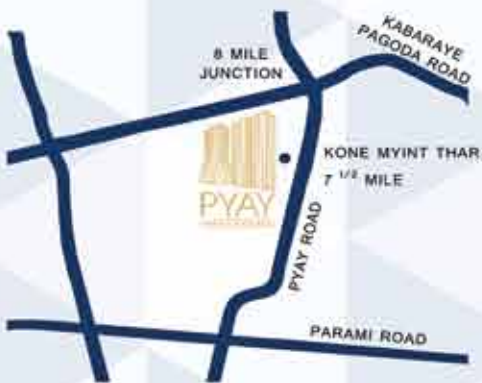
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IN BRIEF

UN rights chief urges Myanmar to halt abuses

The United Nations human rights chief warned on February 25 that widespread abuses of minority rights in Myanmar threatened to undermine reforms in the country.

"Myanmar had promised to end the era of political prisoners, but now seems intent on creating a new generation by jailing people who seek to enjoy the democratic freedoms they have been promised," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

He said the world had hailed the transition in Myanmar since a quasi-civilian regime took power in 2011 after decades of military rule "as a story of promise and hope".

"But recent developments relating to the human rights of minorities, the freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest are calling into question the direction of that reform and even threatening to set it back," he said.

Mr Zeid pointed to the case last week of 14 members of the Michaungkan community jailed for protesting peacefully against the military's alleged confiscation of their land. And in 2014, he said, 10 journalists were jailed "under outdated defamation, trespassing and national security laws".

- AFP

Mandalay court accepts charges against police

Mandalay Region High Court has agreed to hear a case brought against police who shot and wounded a farmer, in clashes that left others injured. The incident occurred last August, when 50 police from Singu township tried to drive farmers off land they were cultivating in Nyaung Pin Wun village, Thabeikkyin township, Mandalay Region.

The farmers complained that their lands had been illegally confiscated.

U Hlaing Thin, a local villager, has accused the police in the matter. "I want to find out the truth. I will not accept this injustice," he said.

Following the incident, he first brought an action at the local police station, which rejected it. He then applied unsuccessfully to launch the action at Singu township court before putting the case at Pyin Oo Lwin District Court, which also dismissed it.

Advocate U Aung Thein, acting for U Hlaing Thin, said the action against the police would be brought under sections 323, 325 and 326 of the Penal Code for causing hurt by means of shooting, causing grievous hurt and causing hurt, and section 505(b). - Mg Zaw, translation by Thiri Min Htun



Children walk past the scene of an accident between a car and a bus in Yangon in March 2013. Photo: Staff

Bus drivers crash out of refresher course

Just 27 of 124 drivers with a heavy vehicle licence who sat the training have passed



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EFFORTS to improve bus drivers' driving skills have a long way to go, transport officials are concluding. A major initiative was launched in May last year following the death of 14 passengers and the injury of 29 others in a bus crash on the Nay Pyi Taw-Yangon Highway. But the results have been disappointing.

Nay Pyi Taw Road Transport Department and the traffic regulation body Ma Hta Tha collaborated in offering practical and theoretical training to holders of so-called "e" licences, also known as "nga" licences after the fifth letter of the Myanmar alphabet. An "e" licence enables the holder to drive a heavy vehicle, such as a bus or truck.

The training was launched as a matter of urgency on May 23, 2014, just 11 days after the accident, which involved a bus from the Yarzarmin line. Nay Pyi Taw Council banned Yarzarmin from operating buses on the route in the wake of the crash.

But of the 124 drivers who have

'We're working with Road Transport to offer a certificate in both practical and theoretical driving. They didn't do very well at either.'

U Win Swe
Ma Hta Tha (Highway)

taken the course, a scant 27 have passed so far. At a certification ceremony on February 21, only 11 drivers attended.

U Win Swe, chair of Ma Hta Tha (Highway), Nay Pyi Taw, said the program was aimed at drivers who already held a valid licence. "We're working with Road Transport to offer a certificate in both practical and theoretical driving. They didn't do very well at either," he said.

U Hlyant Kyint Man, director of the Road Transport Administration Department, said training was important because most accidents occur due to driver error. "Improving driving skills is vital both to economic development and health and safety standards."

He added that death and injury rates due to road accidents had tripled over the past 10 years, with a total of 4313 deaths on the road last year. "Most drivers and passengers don't wear seat belts. People have to follow the rules," he said.

- Translation by Khant Lin Oo

Cartoon campaign aims for safer roads

URGENT measures are required to prevent more death and injury on the roads, the government has warned at the launch of an innovative campaign to improve education about road safety. Minister for Rail Transportation U Than Htay said last week that there had been a "significant" increase in road deaths and injuries over the past decade.

"Due to increased vehicle ownership following economic reforms, this trend will continue unless it is addressed as a matter of urgency," he warned.

In 2014, a total of 14,781 accidents had killed 4163 people and left 25,014 injured, up from 9762 accidents resulting in 2811 deaths and 17,379 injured, official figures show.

Traffic Police chief Colonel Kyaw Htwe said half of all accidents involved motorcycles, and most incidents involved driver error or driving under the influence of alcohol. Yangon, whose roads are jammed with 400,000 of the country's 600,000 cars, is also the scene of most accidents, he added.

Dr Thit Lwin, professor emeritus at the Yangon University of Medicine, told participants that Myanmar's road accident rate was the highest in Southeast Asia, according to World Health Organisation figures. The professor said road accidents were the leading cause of disability and the second-highest cause of accidental death in Myanmar.

The campaign launch, Making Myanmar's Roads Safer: Changing Behaviour through Cartoons, was held in Nay Pyi Taw on February 25, and was attended by government officials, road safety experts, civil society organisations and private sector representatives in a campaign to improve road safety education.

Under the campaign, which is sponsored by brewing giant Heineken, a committee will choose the best road safety cartoon to print on vinyl posters to be distributed around the country.

"This campaign combines cartoons to get the message out in an entertaining and participatory way," said well-known cartoonist Aw Pi Kyeh, who will help choose the winner.

Private sector support for road safety has been welcomed by the ministry, which says lack of funding for preventative activities - from improved driver training to installation of better road signage - is one of the major challenges toward reducing the road toll.

- Shwe Yee Saw Myint

Health stats in eastern Myanmar echo Somalia: report

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THE failings of the state health system have left eastern Myanmar with disease and mortality indicators closer to those of war-torn Somalia than to the rest of Myanmar, a new large-scale survey has shown.

Compiled by the Health Information System Working Group, a network of ethnic and community-based health organisations, the population-based survey covered 64 townships that are home to more

than 456,000 people - mostly ethnic Shan, Kayin, Mon and Kayah minorities.

The health outcomes released last week in a report, titled *The Long Road to Recovery*, fell well below national averages.

The national infant mortality rate is among the worst in the region, at about 41 deaths per 1000 live births. In eastern Myanmar, however, the rate was more than double, at 94.2 per 1000 live births - a figure common to disaster-struck or conflict-ridden nations, the report said.

Mortality rates for children under five years of age were even bleaker, at

141.9 in the east of the country compared to 52 per 1000 nationally.

For all age groups the three leading causes of death were all preventable diseases: diarrhoea, malaria and acute respiratory infections.

Despite being plagued with illness, residents in eastern states lack health care providers.

Less than 10 percent of the survey respondents had access to government-run health centres. In the absence of any state provisions, ethnic communities built their own primary care services, but remain desperately short of resources and personnel needed to address the

ongoing health crisis.

Rather than extending the centralised services, the working group behind the survey recommends boosting existing ethnic community-based providers.

"The locals want to go a [health centre] that is safe for them ... They want to be understood when they speak their language," said Nan Snow of the Back Pack Health Worker Team.

"We call on the government to provide more support to ethnic and community-based organisations," she said.

An official from the Karen National Union's health department

said all options to improve health services in eastern Myanmar should be considered.

"In this region, the rate of death, rights of women, malnutrition of mothers and children, and access to human rights are poor," Eh Kalu Shwe Oo, director of the Karen Department of Health and Welfare, said at a press conference launching the survey last week.

"Structural reform and sustainable peace are needed for long-term change," he said.

Ministry of Health officials declined to comment on the report when contacted.

Rare birds return to Gulf of Mottama

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CONSERVATIONISTS say that persuading local people to be more welcoming has helped boost the number of migrating birds that winter in the Gulf of Mottama. U Pyae Phyo Aung, secretary and program manager of the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA), says the overall population of migrant birds in the area has soared from 30,000 in 2012 to 90,000 in 2015.

The number of critically endangered spoon-billed sandpipers that migrate to a section of the gulf near Bilin and Kyaikto townships in Mon State has more than doubled over the past five years, from 74 in 2010 to 155 this year.

"The main cause of the increasing of the birds' population is the cooperation of local people. BANCA has raised awareness about conservation by forming local conservation groups to keep local residents informed and persuading hunters not to kill the birds," he said.

U Aung Kyaw Nyunt, an executive member of BANCA, said the birds, which are highly sensitive to a rapidly changing environment, could even return the favour. "The observation of the birds can give clues to changes in the weather. It could help protect against natural disaster," he said.



A spoon-billed sandpiper dines in the Gulf of Mottama. Photo: Supplied

About half the global population of spoon-billed sandpipers congregate in Mottama during the rainy season.

BANCA held a "Wetlands Day and Welcome to the Birds" ceremony to raise awareness at Khintan village, Paung township, Mon State, on January 31 to acquaint local people with the natural advantages of their neighbourhood, said Daw Saw Mon Theint, executive director of

BANCA, who added that ecotourism could help raise the economic potential in Mottama during the rainy season.

BANCA has also been promoting Bilin and Kyaikto as a wetlands site.

According to BANCA surveys, the number of spoon-billed sandpipers spotted in the area was 48 in 2008, 47 in 2009, 74 in 2010, 49 in 2011, 100 in 2012 and 155 in 2015. There are only an estimated 500 spoon-billed sandpipers in the world.

Police study up on election rules

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TRAINING for the police in security, electoral law and procedures has begun. Senior officers throughout the country will undergo training in international standards first, and lower ranks will be trained later.

Police Colonel Zaw Khin Aung, deputy head of Nay Pyi Taw Region Police, said the Union Election Commission organised workshops on law and procedure for deputy heads of regional and state police forces last month, while training for second lieutenants and upper ranks took place during February.

The training is scheduled to finish well in advance of the election, which is scheduled for October or November.

"Officers of all ranks will be aware of electoral security requirements. The election will be fair, without bias, and will be conducted in line with international standards," Pol Col Zaw Khin Aung said.

Preparations for election security included consultations with Indonesia, a fellow ASEAN member.

"Myanmar and Indonesia have much in common, though the challenges they face are on a bigger scale. Their electoral system is internationally recognised," said the colonel.

The police are prepared for a range of challenges before, during and after the election, and for all parts of the country, he said.

"Challenges vary according to the region. In Rakhine State there are ethnic problems, and in the border regions there are armed groups. The political situation is complex," he said.

The police are also encouraged because of the experience they gained during the Southeast Asian Games in December 2013, and Myanmar's leadership of ASEAN last year.

"We have learned to operate as public servants in accordance with standards and without bias, no matter which government is in power," he said.

Election Commission officials are advising police on the laws and procedures that will be in force. The chair of the commission for Nay Pyi Taw's Ottarathiri district, U Aung Lwin, said he welcomed the police preparations.

"Our role is to act as referee in the process that will establish a new government from 2016," he said. "We set forth guidance and objectives with the goal of holding transparent and successful elections based on an understanding of our strengths and former weaknesses."

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Irrawaddy dolphin population declines

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THE population of rare Irrawaddy dolphins has declined compared to last year, according to a study just completed. The 12-day survey, conducted from February 11 to 22, found that the Irrawaddy dolphin population on the Ayeyarwady River between Mandalay and Bhamo had fallen from 65 to 58.

U Kyaw Hla Thein, project manager of the Wildlife Conservation Society, described the results as "not good news".

"It's very important to protect this endangered species. We hope local residents will cooperate in dolphin conservation," he said on February 23.

The survey covered three stretches of the river - between Mandalay and Kyaukmyaung, between Kachin State's Shwegu and Sagaing Region's Malal and between Sinkhan and Bhamo in Kachin State.

The survey was jointly conducted by the Department of Fisheries, the Irrawaddy Dolphin Conservation Team and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

In the protected area between Mandalay and Kyaukmyaung, dolphin numbers remain unchanged at 23, while the population between Shwegu and Malal dropped to 25 compared with 28 last year. Between Sinkhan and Bhamo, the number of dolphins fell from 14 to 10.

However, U Kyaw Hla Thein said there may be more dolphins in areas that the teams were unable to access.

"We had no difficulty in conducting the survey, but we couldn't access some places in Bhamo because of security concerns. So I can't say whether the dolphins are still in places where we couldn't reach," he said.

Gold mining and the use of pesticides in fishing have caused the dolphin population to decline.

- Translation by Zar Zar Soe

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"Coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, rice, tapioca, sago, artificial coffee, flour and preparations made from cereals, instant hot cereals; bakery foods; bread, biscuits, cookies, crackers, wafers, chocolates, chocolate covered nuts, pastry and confectionery; pudding desserts and preparation for making pudding desserts; cereal bars; pie crusts, graham cracker crumbs; mustard; steak sauce, condiments; corn snacks (cheese flavored puffed); salad dressings and spices in International Class 30" - Class: 30
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"Coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, rice, tapioca, sago, artificial coffee, flour and preparations made from cereals, instant hot cereals; bakery foods; bread, biscuits, cookies, crackers, wafers, chocolates, chocolate covered nuts, pastry and confectionery; pudding desserts and preparation for making pudding desserts; cereal bars; pie crusts, graham cracker crumbs; mustard; steak sauce, condiments; corn snacks (cheese flavored puffed); salad dressings and spices in International Class 30."

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"Fish, fish and seafood products, all these products in the form of extracts, soups, jellies, spreads, canned products, cooked, deep-frozen or dehydrated dishes; preserved, frozen, preserved, dried and cooked fruits, mushrooms and vegetables; jellies; jams; compotes; eggs; milk and milk products; edible oils and fats; fruit pulp and salads; vegetable salads; tinned fish, vegetables and fruit; edible jellies; pollen prepared as foodstuff; algae essences for food purposes; preserved soya beans for food; protein for human consumption; soups; clear soups; thick soups; concentrated soups; vegetable juices for kitchen use; butter; cream; yoghurts; cheeses; processed cheese; processed cheese foods; cottage cheese; sour cream; cream cheese; preparations for making bouillon; potato products, potato flakes, crisps and chips bases on potato; ready-cooked meals made with the above products; milk substitutes; beverages made with milk; desserts made with milk and desserts made with cream; soya milk (milk substitutes); protein preparations for human consumption; whiteners for coffee and/or tea (cream substitutes); peanut butter; bouillon cubes; stock; broths; pickles; processed nuts; prepared meals containing cheese; processed cheese dips and spreads; vegetable-based spreads and dips; snack mix consisting primarily of processed fruits and nuts; protein-based snack bars." - Class: 29

"Bakery products; dough preparations; snack products in the form of popcorn, crisps as well as snack products based on corn, barley, rye or pastry, Coffee; tea; cocoa; sugar; rice; tapioca; sago; artificial coffee; flour and preparations made from cereals; bread; pastry and confectionery; ices; honey; treacle; yeast; baking-powder; salt; mustard; vinegar; sauces (condiments); spices; ice; cookies; wafers; waffles; biscuits; chocolate; chocolate products; vegetal preparations for use as coffee substitutes; non-medicinal infusions; natural sweeteners; glucose for food; pasta; semolina; dried cereal flakes; cakes; brioche; pancakes; tarts; pies; sugar confectionery; chocolate confectionery; royal jelly for human consumption (not for medical use); aniseed; star aniseed; malt extract for food; flavourings other than essential oils; aromatic preparations for food; dressings for salads; ketchup; mayonnaise; seasonings; thickening agents for cooking foodstuffs; weeds (condiments); spices; preserved garden herbs; ice for refreshment; sandwiches; pizzas; snacks made of rice; spring rolls; sushi; tabbouleh; tortillas; tacos; ready-cooked meals made with the above products; coffee extracts; beverages made with coffee and preparations made with coffee; iced coffee; artificial coffee; artificial coffee extracts; preparations and beverages made with artificial coffee; tea; tea extracts and preparations made with tea; cocoa; preparations and beverages made with cocoa; chocolate; preparations and beverages made with chocolate; sugar; natural sweeteners; malt-based preparations for human consumption; chewing gum, not for medical purposes; caramels; desserts (included in this class); puddings; ices; water ices; sorbets; frozen confectionery; frozen cakes; ice cream; frozen desserts; powders and binding agents (included in this class) for making ices and/or water ices and/or sorbets and/or frozen confectionery and/or frozen cakes and/or ice cream and/or frozen desserts; breakfast cereals; muesli; corn flakes; cereal bars; ready-to-

eat cereals; pasta, noodles; foodstuffs containing rice, flour or cereals, also in the form of cooked dishes; pasta and ready-to-bake cake dough preparations; soya sauce; products for flavoring or seasoning foodstuffs; horseradish; relishes; barbeque sauces; marshmallows; grain-based snack foods; crackers; flavored and sweetened gelatins; stuffing mixes containing bread; packaged meals consisting primarily of pasta and sauces; cheese sauces." - Class: 30

"Mineral and aerated waters and other non-alcoholic drinks; fruit drinks and fruit juices; syrups and other preparations for making beverages; isotonic beverages; lemonades; tomato juice; vegetable juices (beverages); pastilles and powders for aerated drinks; essences for making beverages; preparations for making liqueurs; beverages containing milk ferments; beverages containing soya; non-alcoholic beverages containing malt; beers" - Class: 32

"Advertising; business management; business administration; office functions; rental of vending machines; demonstration of goods; presentation of goods on any communication media for retail purposes, namely sales promotion; commercial information and advice to consumers; organization of exhibitions and trade fairs for commercial or advertising purposes; advertising, including via computer networks in the form of data, text, images, sounds or all combinations thereof for selling products and retailing services as well as provision of information about products for advertising and sales purposes; online advertising on a computer network; providing product catalogues via the Internet; running retail stores (business management); sales promotion for others; procurement for others (purchasing goods and services for other business) as well as export and import agency in respect of a variety of goods in the field of health, food, beverages, household fittings and equipment, articles and utensils for the kitchen and the household, stationery, electric household appliances, electrical apparatus and printed matter; bringing together for the benefit of others of a variety of goods (excluding the transport thereof) in the field of health, food, beverages, household fittings and equipment, articles and utensils for the kitchen and the household, stationery, electric household appliances, electrical apparatus and printed matter to allow customers to view and buy them conveniently from a wholesaler, also by means of global computer networks (the Internet); publishing of product catalogues and mail order catalogues; sales promotions relating to products in the field of health, food, beverages, household fittings and equipment, articles and utensils for the kitchen and the household, stationery, electric household appliances, electrical apparatus and printed matter; retail trade and distribution services, also by means of global computer networks (the Internet) in connection with beverages and foodstuffs for medical purposes, nutritional and dietetic additives for medical purposes, medicinal herbs, herbal teas, mineral food supplements, chewing gum for medical purposes, antiseptics, dietetic confectionery for medical purposes, automatic vending machines, automatic dispensers for hot and cold foodstuffs and beverages, related refill components, cartridges and spare parts for these machines and apparatus, electric machines and apparatus for preparing all types of refrigerated, cold or hot drinks including coffee, tea, and chocolate and/or cocoa drinks, cappuccinos (except for electromechanical machines), electric coffee pots, percolators and machines, cartridges and refills for these apparatus and machines including capsules and spare parts for these machines, electronic coffee filters, electric fryers, ice appliances, paper, cardboard and goods made from these materials, printed matter, bookbinding material, photographs, stationery, adhesives for stationery or household purposes, artists' materials, paint brushes, typewriters and office requisites (except furniture), instructional and teaching material (except apparatus), plastic materials for packaging, printers' type, printing blocks, paper coffee and tea filters, paper or plastic packaging bags, pouches and sheets, paper sheets (stationery), paint boxes (articles for use in school), school supplies, office staples, drawing pins, pencil sharpeners, correcting fluids, paper cutters, pencils, pencil lead holders, rubber erasers, envelopes, files, scrapbooks, books, periodicals, almanacs, pamphlets, writing or drawing books, catalogues, calendars, lithographs, engravings, paintings, posters, geographic maps, newspapers, spools for inking ribbons, sealing machines, postage stamps, greeting cards, postcards, table napkins, household or kitchen utensils

Shwedagon museum undergoes renovation



CHERRY THEIN

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THE Shwedagon Pagoda's board of trustees has started renovation and restoration of its museum near the west gate, said an official on the management committee. Daw Nyo Nyo Win told *The Myanmar Times* that exterior and interior redecoration had begun last September.

An exact completion date has not been set, but officials hope it will be finished in 2016.

Two extra floors will be added to the three-storey building, which now contains exhibitions, Buddhist literature and archives. The library and archives are being moved to the lower platform at the east gate.

The renovation involves repainting, rewiring and the installation of air-conditioning.

"We're keeping open the display for the benefit of pilgrims and visitors, but we will close it later," she said.

At the west gate, the Buddhawin

Exhibition, which tells stories related to the births of the Buddha, is also undergoing renovation, including the construction of a corridor that will improve access.

Daw Nu Mra Zan, a retired deputy director general of the Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library, said there would be 12 exhibition rooms in the new museum.

The first floor will display the Five Buddhas, golden and silver stupas and images, ivory and jewellery, Shwedagon architecture and history, and a diamond bud and umbrella (*hti*).

The second floor will house the Buddha's footprint, relics, and donor and other memorials. Traditional arts and crafts will also be on display, with labels in Myanmar and English.

"This will provide an improved visitor service," said Daw Nu Mra Zan, who is volunteering as an adviser to the team in charge of the project. "Shwedagon is our national landmark. We need better awareness of museology, and need to display to international standards."

The museum was established in 1992.



A staff member at the Shwedagon Pagoda museum moves a display board into place as part of the museum's renovation. Photo: Thiri

IN BRIEF

Pa-O push for people's participation in peace

More public participation is needed in the peace process, speakers at a Pa-O National Conference stated last week. The conference formed a committee to promote more participation of the Pa-O people in politics, including the peace process, U Khun Myint Tun, chair of the Pa-O National Liberation Army (PNLO) said on February 20.

The February 16-19 conference at Tahtone was attended by about 400 representatives of Pa-O political parties, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the PNLO.

"The ceasefire agreements between the PNLO and the government include the promotion of public participation in the peace process, as well as the activities of Pa-O civil society organisations and community-based organisations on the part of both the PNLO and the government," U Khun Myint Tun said.

The committee formed by the conference will take responsibility for the emergence of a Pa-O National Congress scheduled to be held later this year in Taunggyi, Shan State.

"We believe that the third party in the peace process should be the citizens. If people know about the agreements between the ethnic armed groups and the government, none of the sides can break the agreements," he said.

- Lun Min Mang

Continued from page 18

and containers, unworked or semi-worked glass (except glass used in building), glassware, porcelain and earthenware, non electric coffee percolators and filters, tea pots, tea and coffee cups, non-electric household or kitchen utensils and receptacles (neither of precious metal, nor plated therewith), cooking pot sets, plates, bowls, tumblers, sweetmeats boxes, not of precious metals, drinking vessels, saucepans, glass boxes, biscuit tins, picnic baskets (fitted-) including dishes, thermally insulated containers for food, vacuum bottles, corkscrews, bottle-openers, isothermic bags, drinking flasks for travellers, non-electric portable coolers, non-electric heaters for feeding bottles, bowls, baskets, for domestic use, not of precious metal, clothing, footwear, headgear, tee-shirts, shirts, skirts, pullovers, sweat-shirts, blouses, jeans, trousers, Bermuda shorts, dresses, polo shirts, coats, jackets, denim jackets, anoraks, waistcoats, overalls, blazers, scarves, sashes for wear, shawls, combinations, saloppes, socks, ankle socks, stockings, tights, nightshirts, pyjamas, dressing gowns, babies' clothes, underclothes for babies, rompers, bonnets for babies, underwear, lingerie, corsets, hosiery, belts, muffler, gloves, ties, braces, headbands, bathing fashion for gentlemen and ladies, bathing trunks, bathing suits, bikinis, bathing caps, beach robes, leisure and city shoes for gentlemen and ladies, children's footwear, caps, hats, work clothing, work shoes, fish, fish and seafood products, all these products in the form of extracts, soups, jellies, spreads, canned products, cooked, deep-frozen or dehydrated dishes, preserved, frozen, dried and cooked fruits, mushrooms and vegetables, jellies, jams, compotes, eggs, milk and milk products, edible oils and fats, fruit pulp and salads, vegetable salads, tinned fish, vegetables and fruit, edible jellies, pollen prepared as foodstuff, algae essences for food purposes, preserved soya beans for food, protein for human consumption, soups, clear soups, thick soups, concentrated soups, vegetable juices for kitchen use, butter, cream, yoghurts, cheeses, processed cheese, processed cheese foods, cottage cheese, sour cream, cream cheese, preparations for making bouillon, potato crisps, ready-cooked meals made with the above products, milk substitutes, beverages made with milk, desserts made with milk and desserts made with cream, soya milk (milk substitutes), protein preparations for human consumption, whiteners for coffee and/or tea (cream substitutes), peanut butter, bouillon cubes, stock, broths, pickles, processed nuts, prepared meals containing cheese, processed cheese dips and spreads, vegetable-based spreads and dips, snack mix

consisting primarily of processed fruits and nuts, protein-based snack bars, coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, rice, tapioca, sago, artificial coffee, flour and preparations made from cereals, bread, pastry and confectionery, ices, honey, treacle, yeast, baking-powder, salt, mustard, vinegar, sauces (condiments), spices, ice, cookies, wafers, waffles, biscuits, chocolate, chocolate products, vegetal preparations for use as coffee substitutes; non-medicinal infusions, natural sweeteners, glucose for food, pasta, semolina, dried cereal flakes, cakes, brioche, pancakes, tarts, pies, sugar confectionery, royal jelly for human consumption (not for medical use), aniseed, star aniseed, malt extract for food, flavourings other than essential oils, aromatic preparations for food, yeast, dressings for salads, ketchup, mayonnaise, seasonings, thickening agents for cooking foodstuffs, weeds (condiments), spices, preserved garden herbs, ice for refreshment, sandwiches, pizzas, snacks made of rice, spring rolls, sushi, tabbouleh, tortillas, tacos, ready-cooked meals made with the above products, coffee extracts, beverages made with coffee and preparations made with coffee, iced coffee, artificial coffee, artificial coffee extracts, preparations and beverages made with artificial coffee, tea, tea extracts and preparations made with tea, cocoa, preparations and beverages made with cocoa, chocolate, preparations and beverages made with chocolate, sugar, natural sweeteners, malt-based preparations for human consumption, chewing gum, not for medical purposes, wafers, caramels, desserts, puddings, ices, water ices, sorbets, frozen confectionery, frozen cakes, ice cream, frozen desserts, powders and binding agents for making ices and/or water ices and/or sorbets and/or frozen confectionery and/or frozen cakes and/or ice cream and/or frozen desserts, breakfast cereals, muesli, corn flakes, cereal bars, ready-to-eat cereals, pasta, noodles, foodstuffs containing rice, flour or cereals, also in the form of cooked dishes, pasta and ready-to-bake cake dough preparations, soya sauce, products for flavoring or seasoning foodstuffs, horseradish, relishes, barbeque sauces, marshmallows, grain-based snack foods, crackers, flavored and sweetened gelatins, stuffing mixes containing bread, packaged meals consisting primarily of pasta and sauces, cheese sauces, mineral and aerated waters and other non-alcoholic drinks, fruit drinks and fruit juices, syrups and other preparations for making beverages, isotonic beverages, lemonades, tomato juice, vegetable juices (beverages), pastilles and powders for aerated drinks, essences for making beverages, preparations for making liqueurs, beverages containing milk ferments, beverages containing soya and non-alcoholic beverages containing malt; retail trade and distribution services,

also by means of global computer networks (the Internet) in connection with medical preparations for slimming purposes, medicinal infusions, vitamin preparations, preparations of trace elements for human and animal use, foodstuffs and lacteal flour for babies, medical or sanitary disinfectants (excluding soaps), anti-insect products, insecticides, insect repellents, antiparasitic preparations, antiparasitic collars for animals, animal washes, sunscreen products (sunburn ointments), antiseptic cotton, absorbent cotton, sanitary pads, napkins and panties, menstruation tampons, breast-nursing pads, sterilising preparations, adhesives for dentures, deodorants, other than for personal use, air purifying preparations, solutions for use with contact lenses; beers" - Class: 35

"Providing of food and drink; self-service restaurants; fast-food restaurants and snackbars; restaurant, cafe and bar services; cafeterias; canteens; food and drink catering services; temporary accommodation; accommodation agencies (hotels, boarding-houses); hotel services; motel and boarding houses services; beerhouses, tea rooms reservation services for hotels and boarding-houses; holiday camp services (accommodation); holiday houses; providing campground facilities; day nurseries; retirement homes; boarding for animals; rental of chairs, tables, table linen, glassware; rental of portable buildings; rental of temporary accommodation; rental of conference rooms; rental of tents." - Class 43

BELVITA

(Reg: Nos. IV/5673/2009 & IV/17666/2014)

in respect of:- "Nutritional food supplements, including energy bars, low-crab bars and diet bars- Int'l Class: 5"

"Cheese and dairy-based products - Int'l Class: 29"

"Cookies, cookie bars, crackers, chocolate and snack bars, including cereal bars, breakfast bars, granola bars, candy bars, nut bars, energy bars, protein bars, low-crab bars, cereal and milk bars, fruit bars, yoghurt bars, diet bars and confectionary - Int'l Class: 30"

"Juices and water - Int'l Class: 32"

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Dated: 2nd March, 2015



People celebrate on a pandal beside Mandalay's moat during last year's water festival. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

Wet and not-so-wild: Officials up fines to tone down water festival

SI THU LWIN
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MERRYMAKERS during this year's Thingyan water festival will have to follow the rules - or risk losing millions, Mandalay city officials say. The city development committee is demanding a deposit of K2 million from all those applying to build pandals, the roadside wooden stands that serve as firing platforms from which passing traffic and pedestrians are soaked with water.

The deposit is in addition to the K500,000 required at the time of application, and is payable once permission has been granted.

"We're asking for K2 million because some pandals broke the rules last year. If any pandal sponsor is guilty of a violation, we will deduct money from the deposit and may

take legal action as well," U Aung Soe, head of the Department of Revenue, told *The Myanmar Times* on February 23.

Last year's problems ranged from pandal guests being extremely intoxicated to damage to municipal infrastructure and nearby trees.

Deposits will be returned on April 24, the end of the Water Festival, to all law-abiding pandal sponsors.

The department has announced 26 rules applicable both to water-splashing pandals and entertainment pandals. These include that pandals should be at least 7.5 metres (25 feet) from traffic junctions, and should not employ fire hoses or play music with lyrics damaging to the image of the country. Guests must not wear inappropriate clothing.

Violators will not only be docked all or part of their deposit, but also be blacklisted and banned from sponsoring a pandal next year, said U Aung Soe.

Pandals are permitted all around the moat, but the most popular spots lie along the eastern and southern moat, with few applicants showing interest in the western and northern stretches.

Regular participants did not seem to think the new charge would dampen anyone's enthusiasm. "The deposit is quite cheap compared to Yangon," said U Nyunt Win Maw of Smile Water Festival pandal, which has celebrated the festival for six years.

Last year, there were 55 pandals in Mandalay, mostly for splashing and spraying purposes.

- Translation by Emoon

Judges still feel the heat despite steps to reform

SANDAR LWIN

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THE justice system strives for independence but is still being subjected to influence and pressures from the government, judges said at a workshop earlier this month. About 50 senior members of the judicial sector, including judges from the Supreme Court and state and region high courts, attended the two-day discussion on judicial independence and integrity in Nay Pyi Taw.

Judges may no longer receive formal instructions from the government on the disposition of a case. But they say they still encounter the attitude among some civil servants that the government can and should tell the courts who to convict and how to punish them, they say.

"Even discussing the ways that pressure is exerted on the judiciary is sensitive," said U Myo Thant, a high court advocate.

Nevertheless, discussions were frank - perhaps surprisingly so - at the workshop, which was organised by the International Commission of Jurists.

"Participants were very open about the serious obstacles to their independence and accountability that they face, including pressure from other branches of government and from powerful actors in cases that are politically sensitive or have high economic constraints," said Saman Zia-Zarifi, director of the group's Asia and Pacific program.

Supreme Court director general U Myo Tint, who acts as spokesperson for the court, said U Thein Sein's government had stopped the practice of sending formal instructions to judges, but that informal and indirect influences may still be strong.

"There would be serious consequences if formal instructions were sent," he said. "Government staff should not say or think that the court will automatically convict someone just because they have filed a case against them."

He also pointed out that the co-location of many township courts in the office of the General Administration Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, which also files charges in criminal cases, fostered this mindset. It also harmed the image of justice, he said.

The judiciary is also now in the financial pocket of the government, as it lost many of its premises when it was formally separated from the administration with the introduction of the 2008 constitution.

"It's natural that some people in such a situation might think they can influence or intervene in the judicial process. The Supreme Court is trying to alter that mindset," he said.

'Even discussing the ways that pressure is exerted on the judiciary is sensitive.'

U Myo Thant
High court advocate

The judiciary is still emerging from 40 years of subjection to military regimes, a state of affairs that ended with the handover to the present government. But judges know they still have a long way to go to regain their independence.

Judges at all levels still have to attend regular meetings called by the executive branch. U Myo Tint said even the Supreme Court has to resist assignments handed out by the executive.

"We don't attend the meetings now. If the judiciary is invited to participate in committees or projects by the executive, senior judges withdraw from them," he said.

Azhar Cachalia, the chair of the executive committee of the ICJ and a Supreme Court justice in South Africa, said breaking the links between the judiciary and the other branches of the government was the first step toward independence and integrity.

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Tourism destinations already under strain, survey finds

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MAKING sure tourism does more good than harm - that is the aim of research conducted by the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, whose results were released on February 20 at the MAC Tower in Yangon. Some of Myanmar's flagship sites such as Bagan, Inle and Kyaikhtiyo are already under environmental and social pressure from the effects of tourism, the survey said. This affects

the livelihood of local inhabitants and the long-term viability of such places as tourism destinations.

"The number of local and foreign tourists has increased, which has had both good and bad effects. We want to increase the positive effects and reduce the negative impact of tourism," said Daw Thi Thi Thein of the MCRB, who managed the survey.

The centre's assessment makes recommendations to government, businesses, civil society groups, tourists and others.

"Spending by foreigners rose and the number of jobs increased. But negative impacts could arise if big companies pursue projects without negotiating with local residents," she said.

The survey covered culture, the environment, gender, labour and child rights, and held consultations with residents of each region, she said.

The tourism sector would be better if the government provided awareness training to local residents about different cultures, capacity development

and business consciousness. "Tourists might not come back if their experience is not satisfactory," she said.

U Nyein Chan, co-founder of the Responsible Myanmar Organisation, said sharing tourism knowledge and experience would help local businesses. "This could help restaurants, transportation, souvenir shops and residents in regional," he said.

The government already has policies to encourage responsible tourism, but the lack of capacity and resources means that implementation

is incomplete, MCRB director Vicky Bowman said.

"There's too much focus on hard infrastructure and hotel construction. Myanmar needs to rein in the rush to create hotel zones. Our field research showed that many of the negative impacts were associated with hotel zones. The government's own master plan identified participatory destination management and zonal planning, which is not same thing as establishing a hotel zone," Ms Bowman said.



A vintage car is parked on the street in Mandalay on February 23. Photo: Si Thu Lwin

Vintage cars roll into Mandalay

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A CAVALCADE of veteran and vintage automobiles entered Mandalay this week as the latest and final stage of a Southeast Asian tour.

More than 150 enthusiasts are taking part in the rally. Local firms Myanma Hotel and Tourism Services and Essence of Myanmar Travels and Tours are helping to organise the event, which involved travels

through Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand before they arrived in Myanmar, said Ko Win Tun of Essence of Myanmar, a member of the organising team.

"Driving these old cars is a lot of fun. Most of them have special fuel and oil needs, so we have to check the route in advance to make sure they can get supplies," he said.

The group arrived at the Myawaddy border gate on February 19 in more than 80 venerable vehicles and

proceeded to Mawlamyaing and Nay Pyi Taw before entering Mandalay via Inle.

The oldest cars in the caravan date back to 1907, and the sprightliest to 1970. Only about 60 of the cars made it to Mandalay, with some retiring to Yangon early due to damage sustained en route.

After Mandalay, the group will go on to Bagan and then Yangon, where they will end their historic trip.

- Translation by Emoon

Corrupt civil servants dodge prison terms



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JUST one of 450 civil servants punished for corruption has received a jail term in the almost four years since U Thein Sein's government took office, a senior minister has revealed. The vast majority received a slap on the wrist.

At a February 24 workshop to review the government's actions under the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Minister for the President's Office U Tin Naing Thein said another 18 were forced to retire.

But 362 of the bureaucrats faced only administrative penalties, while 69 were transferred to another department.

U Tin Naing Thein insisted that combating corruption was a serious priority for the government.

"Corruption is a widespread problem, a threat not just within a country but across international borders. Anti-corruption efforts must be carried out both locally and in collaboration with the international community," said the minister.

It appears to be making some progress, too. According to the most recent Corruption Perceptions Index released by Transparency International, Myanmar was ranked 156 of 176 countries, up from a low of 172 of 174 in 2012.

Signing up to the UN convention re-

quires the government to undertake a series of reviews, of which the first must be completed this year. It deals with criminalisation, law enforcement and international cooperation, said U Mya Win, chair of the Anti-corruption Commission, which was formed in February 2014.

The second review, which must be completed by 2020, will cover preventive measures and asset recovery.

Among ASEAN members, Singapore, Thailand and Cambodia as well as Myanmar have yet to complete the first review required by the convention. Myanmar ratified the convention in 2012 and joined the Southeast Asia Parties against Corruption in December 2013.

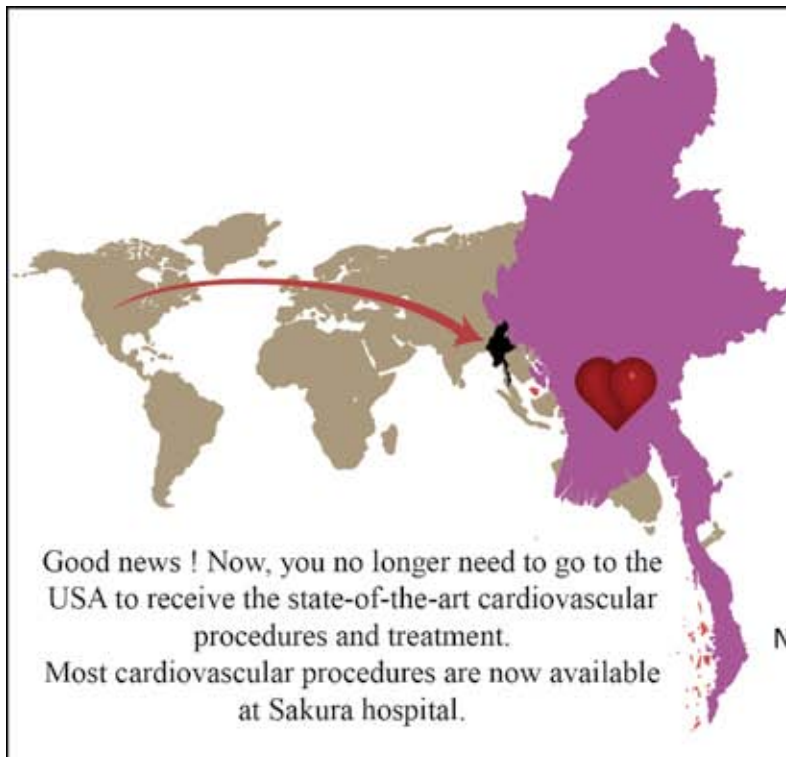
The Anti-corruption Commission, which is manned by former government officials, has been accused of failing to take the steps required to rein in corruption. The commission has received more than 1000 complaints to date, but has so far investigated only nine, according to members.


U Mya Win insisted at the workshop that the commission would work "step by step" to eliminate corruption.

"The Myanmar Anti-corruption Commission is a new body, but it will implement its anti-corruption process successfully, both locally and in cooperation with international anti-corruption groups," said U Mya Win.


U Tin Naing Thein said cooperation was needed to tackle corruption.

"Everyone has the responsibility to prevent and control corruption," he said. - Translation by Thiri Min Htun





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Views

Myanmar education system is failing disabled children



EWAN CAMERON

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WHAT do we mean when we say someone is disabled? From a medical perspective, we are referring to a person's medical or health-based impairments, such as an inability to walk or a neurological disorder that inhibits intellectual development.

Yet from a sociological perspective, we can examine the structure of a society and how it contributes to and magnifies disability. A society that excludes those with disabilities is a disabling society – and nowhere is this more apparent than in its education system.

Those in Myanmar with a physical or intellectual disability are not only impaired by their individual problems, but by a society that marginalises them from childhood. A child who suffers from a moderate-to-severe disability – physical or mental – faces stark choices. If they live in a large city, they may attend specialist government schools, which are well meaning but segregate them from their larger peer group. There is also the option for private schools, but in the absence of government financial support for either child or school these remain out of reach for most families.

A society that excludes those with disabilities is a disabling society.

They may be allowed to attend mainstream schools, but there is no obligation and schools can refuse an entrant if they feel they cannot support them. If a child is accepted, then there is little support given as schools have no funding or special training to genuinely accommodate those with disabilities.

It is clear that the Myanmar education system does not adequately provide for children with disabilities. A 2010 survey conducted by the Ministry of Social Welfare found that almost half of those with disabilities in Myanmar never attended school. Both regionally and globally, Myanmar is falling further and further behind on the issue.

In the field of disability rights there is a growing push toward inclusive education, which means that those with special educational needs attend mainstream schools and are given support. Simply giving those with disabilities the right to attend mainstream schools is not enough. An open door means nothing if getting through that door is still a struggle.

An inclusive education system means that those with special needs receive support to help them participate in mainstream education as much as possible. Many countries make inclusive education a required component of their teacher training courses, so that all educators have strategies for managing special needs. Schools and districts can also

employ specialist educators who can provide tailored education for those in need, either working directly with one school or serving a local area.

Inclusive education schools often have resource rooms where those with special needs can receive personalised training to help them adjust to regular classes. These enable those with more severe needs to still learn within the main school compound, potentially joining in with music, arts, sports, and recreation activities and classes.

Inclusive education also aims to make physical environments unrestrictive, providing ramps and proper access to toilets, for example. An important point is that inclusive education helps not just those who have traditionally been marginalised, but other children too, as it necessitates a learning process that helps all individuals get the support they need.

Implementation of inclusive education in schools is no easy task. With a child-centred approach to education, policy needs to be creative and flexible enough so local educators and officials are empowered to effectively respond to the needs of their students and not wade through government bureaucracy for funding needs when they arise.

It is not enough to treat children with disabilities as a homogenous group – there must be a system that analyses the needs of each individual. Whilst it is accepted that a move toward inclusive education will require more funding, the money spent now re-imagining an education system will be a lot less than the cost of segregated schooling or the cost of social services for those whose needs are not met by the education system. More importantly, without action on inclusive education, Myanmar runs the risk of marginalising another generation of persons with disabilities.

In the 2000s, the Ministry of Education declared that inclusive education would be a part of its Education for All program. The Education for All National Action plan, started in 2003, aimed for all children to have access to free and compulsory education by 2015. It is clear that this goal has not been achieved.

But things are looking up. The newly formed Myanmar Council for Persons with Disabilities, an independent body appears set to become an important national voice, bringing together groups from around the country. The government appears supportive of disability rights and inclusive education. In 2011 it ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which situates disabilities and inclusive education within a human rights context. A new law on the rights of persons with disabilities is being drafted in parliament with input from disability activists, and looks likely to mention inclusive education. There is also hope that the amended National Education Law will address the issue.

This time, rhetoric will not be enough. Although it is a positive step that inclusive education for people with disabilities is being viewed through a human rights lens, it isn't something that can just be granted. It needs to be aggressively pursued, creatively implemented and constantly re-affirmed.

Ewan Cameron is an education policy fellow at Thabyay Education Foundation.



Demonstrators raise clenched fists during a protest in Manila on February 22 calling for the resignation of Philippine President

Aquino dithers, stumbles



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A VISIT to Manila can be rather shocking these days – even when travelling there from quasi-military governed Myanmar, let alone from Thailand with its now entrenched junta of generals.

There is widespread talk of a possible army coup in the Philippines and it is entirely the fault of some astonishingly hapless – some would say cowardly or even sinister – recent moves by President Benigno Aquino.

Could it happen? Is it possible that another founder member of ASEAN might follow Thailand and regress into the repressive clutches of another bunch of army dunderheads?

Thankfully, at this stage, it still appears unlikely, but the drumbeat echoing across the Manila Bay is distinctly unnerving.

Let us consider how Aquino, whose administration started tolerably well and managed to sustain an economic upsurge initiated under his predecessor, has suddenly landed in a monumental pickle.

It began in January, when, under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement that Aquino signed with the United States last year, he was told that drones had confirmed military intelligence pinpointing an international terrorist in Mindanao.

The man, Zulkifli Abdir, widely known as Marwan, was hiding in the village of Mamasapano, inside territory controlled by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which has recently inked a peace deal with Aquino.

Actually, it is unclear whether Marwan was being sheltered by the MILF or by a more radical splinter group called the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF).

The distinction is significant because the BIFF seeks independence for Bangsamoro, the Muslim-majority region of western Mindanao, while MILF leaders have settled for substantial autonomy under Aquino's peace accord.

That accord was destined to be the president's great legacy – provided he could get the Philippine Congress to pass a law required to implement it.

Unfortunately, after the Marwan incident, passage of the legislation is now doubtful. Observers even say the entire peace agreement may be dead in the water.

But we are jumping ahead. After receiving news about Marwan's location, Aquino flew to the northwestern Mindanao city of Zamboanga to monitor a secret operation to take out the terrorist.

Under his authorisation, the raid was conducted by police Special Action Force (SAF) commandos during the night of January 25.

The fact that SAF officers were used rather than military men was apparently for reasons of secrecy, but it upset the armed forces top brass and appears to have contributed to ill-feeling and communication breakdowns.

Still, the operation went well at first and Marwan was captured. He was being spirited out of the jungle by the police commandos when things went horribly wrong.

The raiding party was ambushed by a larger and more heavily armed force from either the MILF or, more likely, the BIFF. Facing annihilation, they radioed for a backup contingent of commandos to come to their rescue.

Their call was passed to a stunned Aquino, who had been ready to go on nationwide TV and celebrate the great success of Marwan's capture, but instead now faced a mismanaged and horrific tragedy.

As per his habit in times of crisis, he dithered over whether a wipe-out of the SAF group was a better option than risking the entire peace deal by sending in a large force to engage the MILF.

Finally, he vetoed any rescue and as a result 44 police commandos were slaughtered, some being

reportedly shot in cold blood as they lay on the ground injured.

Marwan was apparently killed and an SAF survivor cut off one of his fingers, which was later DNA-tested by the Americans to prove it was from the terrorist. His body was never recovered, however, and the evidence that he was eliminated is suspect.

Regardless, Filipinos were stunned when they heard about the botched raid and the police death toll, and perhaps more so by the way Aquino seemed to initially shrug off the incident as a mishap.

A firestorm of criticism quickly engulfed the president. People demanded to know why an under-strength police unit rather than elite army troops had been sent into rebel territory without prior coordination with the MILF.

Aquino forgot the cardinal rule about what to do when stuck in a hole: Stop digging.

And why, when the fusillade began, did Aquino not call the MILF leader, Ibrahim Murad, and order it to stop in line with a ceasefire agreement that was part of the peace accord?

Even worse, why had he refused to allow the backup force to go in and rescue the police commandos?

Trying to respond, Aquino forgot the cardinal rule about what to do when stuck in a hole: Stop digging.

Instead, his unfeeling comments and actions not only led him to be called an incompetent lackey of the Americans, but it caused the military's top brass to vent their earlier qualms about the operation. Meanwhile, furious legislators vowed to vote down his historic peace accord.

As well as that possibility, there were calls for Aquino himself to be removed from office.



dent Benigno Aquino. Photo: AFP

es, falls

Already, Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago has revealed she has heard of meetings to discuss mounting a coup against Aquino, while Defence Secretary Voltaire Gazmin said he was aware of those plots.

Others have urged Congress to impeach Aquino, but that is less likely, given that Vice President Jejomar Binay has scores to settle with other legislators that would dissuade them from agreeing to let him take over.

More than likely the crippled Aquino will struggle on until his term ends next year and the similarly crippled peace agreement will be kicked down the road until a more fortuitous time arrives to pass the required law - if that time ever does arrive.

It is all a huge mess and a lamentable ending to Aquino's great dream.

How responsible are foreign investors?

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“DO you have policies and procedures in place to prevent your business activities or investment from contributing to human rights abuses and social conflict in Myanmar?”

This is one of the questions that the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, an international NGO, asked to more than 100 foreign companies investing or operating in Myanmar through a tracking project launched in November 2014. Only half of the companies approached have responded and only a quarter actually provided relevant information on their human rights policies and due diligence efforts in Myanmar.

Considering that Asian companies represent the majority of foreign investors in Myanmar, we are particularly concerned that only about one-third of companies headquartered in Asia have responded. So far, for example, only one Chinese company has sent a response: Wanbao Mining. Instead of responding to the questions, however, it sent information about its corporate social responsibility activities, and environmental and social impact assessments related to its Letpadaung mine operations. Huawei, which is a supplier to major telecom operators in Myanmar, declined to respond.

Too many foreign companies investing in Myanmar are not doing enough to address the risk of causing or contributing to human rights abuses. The inability of most companies to disclose their human rights commitments is worrying. Foreign companies are entering a country in transition, where their responsibilities toward people and communities are extensive, and where enhanced human rights due diligence and transparency are especially important in taking a leadership role and influencing local partners.

“Foreign investment into Myanmar is essential for economic development and growth, but it cannot happen at any cost. Investors and local companies need to consider the social impacts of their joint ventures - how to minimise risks and how best to ensure that investments are



A protester shouts as Chinese funeral papers are burned in front of the Chinese embassy in Yangon on December 23, a day after a protester was shot at the Letpadaung copper mine in Sagaing Region. Photo: AFP

sustainable in social and not just economic terms,” said John Morrison, executive director of the UK-based Institute for Human Rights and Business, one of the organisations that helped to set up the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business.

Reports on how business activities in Myanmar are linked to serious rights abuses - including violence, land grabs and labour-related abuses - come out on a regular basis. Last month, Amnesty International issued a report alleging that foreign mining companies have profited from serious human rights abuses around the Monywa copper mine, which is now operated by Wanbao in partnership with Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited.

Community and nationwide protests sparked by allegations of land confiscations and environmental harm led to a temporary suspension of mine operations, violence and the recent death of a protester. About 200 workers recently protested against a

local subsidiary of Total due to mass terminations and low compensation.

While the government is still in the process of deciding on a minimum wage, Myanmar was recently named one of the five best countries in the world for cheap labour by the Labor Costs Index. In spite of the risks of exploitative labour practices, the prospect of cheap labour will attract more investors, especially in the textile and garment sectors.

These and other similar reports paint an alarming pattern of businesses being linked to serious community harms and, in the process, failing to generate the benefit and prosperity for the Myanmar people that the government claims to aspire for.

“Foreign companies investing in Myanmar need to be aware that the government is failing to regulate business activities and fulfil its duty to protect human rights. Companies cannot limit themselves to respecting these inadequate national laws,” said Daniel Aguirre, the international legal

adviser for the International Commission of Jurists in Yangon.

“Instead, they should use their influence to push the government to adopt human rights law and set a level playing field.”

The glass is not only half empty. The 59 responses received to date by Business & Human Rights Resource Centre are a step forward in corporate human rights transparency. The responding companies - by both what they say and don't say - open themselves to heightened public scrutiny and constructive discussion. Some responses set standards and provide useful guidance, raising the global bar on corporate transparency and disclosure on human rights issues.

For example, Telenor and Ericsson disclosed their human rights impact assessment and their policies on privacy rights and responsible supply chain management. BG Group explained its cross-functional approach to implementing its human rights policy; Adidas and Coca-Cola detailed not only their due diligence process prior to sourcing from Myanmar but also their ongoing engagement efforts.

On February 24, the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre and the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business hosted a roundtable discussion with local civil society organisations to assess the responses and discuss possible ways to keep pushing human rights issues higher up companies' list of priorities.

Transparency is an indicator of responsible business practices and a good first step, but we need to move from policies to practice and reality on the ground. This was the message from many civil society organisations leaders. There are hundreds more companies - large and small - that need to be engaged. And the more important work of checking policies against actual practice remains to be done, as companies' human rights commitments do not necessarily reflect their actual practices.

Irene Pietropaoli and Bobbie Sta Maria are researchers of Business & Human Rights Resource Centre based in Southeast Asia. All company responses received so far are available on the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre website.

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Business

Shelves run dry as alcohol pulled



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RETAIL outlets removed imported liquor from their shelves last week in response to government pressure on importing foreign alcohol, according to industry sources.

Government checks have previously shown that nearly 90 percent of liquor imports cross into the country illegally, while much of the rest comes from duty-free shops. Liquor imports are generally illegal, though there are limited loopholes intended for duty-free purchases and hotel imports.

Bodies including the Ministry of Commerce, the Tax Advisory Board and the Myanmar Retailers Association have met for two years to discuss revamping import policies, after a high-profile series of government raids in late 2013 left several retailers dry.

After the latest meeting in mid-February, retailers said they had little choice but to suspend sales of imports.

"There was no discussion in the meeting, they just told us what they want," said Myanmar Retailers Association executive member U Aung Naing Myint.

The meeting came due to pressure from prominent local alcohol and cigarette firms who goaded the Tax Advisory Board into taking action on imports, he said.

"It has been getting worse after the meeting. Some supermarkets and convenience stores are taking the products off their shelves," he said.

Liquor imports have long been banned in Myanmar. However, distributors previously got around this

restriction partly by importing through hotels, which are allowed to bring in foreign booze.

Government officials cracked down on this process in high-profile raids in late 2013. The Ministry of Commerce has since promised to revamp its liquor import policy, though so far have only added restrictions, according to U Aung Naing Myint.

City Mart marketing executive U Pyae Nyein Lu said the Myanmar Retailers Association and various government departments have been holding official meetings since June 2013 on ways to amend the laws and allow import and sales of foreign liquor and cigarettes.

The association has been presenting information on laws and best practices from other countries to develop local policy.

"For reasons which are unknown to the [Myanmar Retailers Association], as of February 2015, a policy has not yet been implemented. Due to the absence of this policy, several members of the [association] have decided to stop selling such products in their stores with effect from 21 February 2015," he said.

The situation is very difficult for all retailers. "We want officials to regulate the market properly to fulfill the customer's needs," he said.

Other local businesses are worried about restrictions on applying for liquor licences, while licence fees are set to double and liquor taxes to increase in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Still, the lack of a legal importing process has proven the most frustrating for businesses selling liquor.

"For now, we are not able to do anything and we are disappointed that we can't fulfill our customer needs," said Pyae Nyein Lu.

U Aung Naing Myint said the government's moves appear designed to keep a low profile on the issue.



"The government doesn't want people to respond as they have deviated from the market economy, so they are not announcing this in newspapers and just forcing changes on the retailers," he said. "This is not a proper way to protect against fake products or buying illegal items, as customers [affected] want to buy imports, not the local products."

Government officials said the latest move may cut down on fake alcohol,

which is prevalent on the market.

Ministry of Commerce adviser U Maung Aung said at least 70 percent of imported products are fakes, creating a problem that needs to be addressed.

Even duty-free shops cannot guarantee they carry genuine goods, he said. The code number on bottles are sometimes faded in an effort to hide where they are coming from.

"We hope this will be addressed as soon as possible," he said. "Wine should

be the first thing to get permission [to be imported]."

The government has acted in an effort to safeguard the local industry when completing rules and regulations on liquor.

Liquor shops sometimes charge different prices for the same product, depending on whether it is 100pc genuine, half-genuine or one-third genuine.

Domestic firms have also taken fake products and distributed the goods in local shops. The distillers use bottles collected from restaurants, dressed up with accessories purchased from the Chinese and Thai border and then bottled with local booze. Fakes are particularly common in popular brands, such as Scotch whiskey.

Internal Revenue Department director U Myo Min Zaw said that since tax is collected on locally-made booze, it is important that illegally-imported products are stopped. Seized imports are transferred to the Customs Department for auction.

"Our plans to seize illegal products in the market depends on instructions from the senior level," he said.

Taxes are also set to increase on certain sin items. Earlier this year the Internal Revenue Department said the commercial tax on cigarettes will rise from 100pc of their value to 120pc. Liquor taxes will increase from 50pc to 60pc, according to a draft of the 2015 Union Tax Law.

Myanmar Liquor Association deputy chair U Zaw Win said imported products are causing locally produced goods to take less market share, with fake products particularly to blame for out-competing domestically made booze.

"The problem of fakes is the show for the industry," he said.

Imported products generally sell for several times the price of their local competitors.

Tower firms turn the corner

Industry changes likely following last year's rush to put steel in the ground

JEREMY MULLINS

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THE second year of building is under way for the tower companies working to extend coverage for Telenor and Ooredoo, moving steel and concrete by truck and buffaloes to thousands of sites around the country.

Apollo Towers global project management officer Bill Pollack said the firm has learned a lot in the last year, as it worked through difficulties such as obtaining leases and permits and contending with the weather.

"We've learned how to do this," he said. "We've learned how to get past the rainy season - in fact we're already preparing for it. We've hired our teams of water buffaloes because it's the only way you can get steel to sites in the rainy season. Trucks can't make it."

There was intense pressure in the industry last year to get the steel in the ground so the two foreign telecom operators could begin services on time.

Ooredoo and Telenor selected two tower companies apiece early last year for their initial build - Ooredoo with Myanmar Tower Company and Pan Asia Majestic Eagle, Telenor with Apollo and Irrawaddy Green Towers. With further rollouts coming from them as well as MPT and possibly a fourth operator,

winners and losers among the tower companies are likely to emerge.

There are also at least two more companies - including Young Investment Group - that are looking to enter the business.

Generally, tower companies make the initial investment to build each tower and provide for upkeep and power the site. The operators then place their equipment on the tower, paying a regular lease instalment for the privilege.

Tower sharing has also only happened on a limited scale in Myanmar so far, but the next rollouts may see more extensive use of the concept.

"We were encouraged to [share towers] and it makes sense," said Ooredoo Myanmar CEO Ross Cormack. "The difference we make is through telecommunications services, so if we can speed up the rollout by sharing, if we can lower the cost of rollout by sharing, both of these allow us to reach more people more quickly and more cost-effectively."

Tower companies generally make a large up-front investment while securing and building the site and then earn revenue through leasing space to mobile service providers. In general if the tower company has more than one tenant it is able to earn more revenue, while the service providers often end

up paying less if they co-locate with a competitor.

Telenor CEO Petter Furberg said savings can be passed on to its users, as tower sharing cuts costs. "We have always said, and I believe our competitors are saying the same, that tower sharing and fibre sharing make a lot of sense in Myanmar."

There are also savings on electricity use if a tower is carrying equipment from more than one company.

Tower company officials say there is the possibility of interference from overlapping equipment on a shared tower, but it is closely monitored and so far not much of a problem.

Mr Pollack said his firm had designed its business model around sharing. "Sharing is good for everybody," he said. "It's good for Apollo because we can charge the operator less and still run a sustainable business. It's good for the operators because they pay less. And at the end of the day it's good for Myanmar citizens because cell phone [costs] are dropping and will continue to drop."

Still, tower sharing means there may not be a need for as many tower companies, forcing consolidation in the sector. Industry insiders told *The Myanmar Times* that in the long run there will likely be three or four tower companies,



as opposed to the four to six there are today.

Mr Pollack said some discussions are currently under way that could result in consolidation.

Still, whether one or another tower company is building a tower has minimal impact on an end-user, provided the quality is high enough.

Mr Pollack said the consumer should never know what tower company is involved, as it is part of the infrastructure.

"When you take a railroad from point A to point B, you don't know who

built the tracks and you're not supposed to care, as long as the quality is there," he said.

A big change on the horizon is the possible entrance of a fourth mobile operator. Mr Pollack said they could decide to share entirely rather than build their own towers.

Still, some of the initial headaches for the tower companies, including permits and construction techniques, are now more understood.

"The factory is humming along," he said.

Ooredoo and Telenor take services beyond the biggest cities

BUSINESS 30



All quiet on the zoning plan front as experts push for restart

PROPERTY 34

Exchange Rates (February 28 close)

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

Local iPhone sales given okay from Apple



CATHERINE TRAUTWEIN

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APPLE has begun allowing certain Myanmar stores to start selling iPhones, marking a change in strategy for the company, after previously limiting official sales to a shorter list including Mac computers and iPod products.

Authorised resellers are required to receive extensive approval from the American tech firm in everything from store location and design to stock they carry before receiving approval. The high standards can push a shop to become better, but require significant investments of time and money.

Apple has four authorised resellers in Myanmar: One Futureworld, mDrive, The Analytics Company (TAC) and Wai Yan Electronics. All have the go-ahead to start selling iPhones, but their launches have so far been different.

The devices are available at Wai Yan Electronics and TAC, while short notice and limited stock at One Futureworld has restricted offerings, and mDrive won't have iPhones until completion of a government licencing process, said officials from each respective reseller.

The iPhone's debut last week represents a shift in Apple's approach to Myanmar, as the company had previously held the smartphone back from the market.

One Futureworld had delayed further development in Myanmar because Apple had not approved the sale of iPhones and iPads. That permission in part relied "on the telecoms network", said Michael Leong of One Futureworld's Singapore office, who is working with the company's local partners in Yangon. "If it's not stable, available freely or to the public, then Apple may not want to open the iPhone market in that country," he said.

TAC managing director U Maxim Thaw Tint had said the question around iPhone and iPad sales was "when", not "if". "The moment you put a SIM card [in], it becomes a telco territory. Apple has a separate iPhone team that sits down and negotiates with each telco operator," he said, speaking of Singapore. "So always there is an integration time ... [The] same is happening in Myanmar."

Now, all four local authorised resellers have been given the green light to sell iPhones, representing one of many stamps of approval along the road resellers walk.

The process around establishing outposts, with steps dictated by Apple, can be a long one - while the leash is seen as relatively short.

"I would say it's crazy to do Apple business, because their rules and regulations are so tight," said one reseller when asked the hardest part about getting authorised.

Meanwhile, U Maxim Thaw Tint said TAC has been working toward opening a new store in Hledan Centre since 2013. Apple has had to give the thumbs up at many stages of development, but took issue with the spot in the mall TAC hoped to move into - across

the way from Samsung.

Instead of an IT brand, the corporation identifies as a lifestyle brand like Adidas and Nike, according to U Maxim Thaw Tint. That meant moving house to a different space at double the cost.

Resellers represent the brand as being particular when it comes to design as well. "All my tables were made and assembled in Singapore and Malaysia and brought here with the materials and the colours, everything approved by Apple," Daw Khine Thit Lwin said.

"Apple does not negotiate with the resellers," U Maxim Thaw Tint said. "There's only one way, which we have to follow."

Selling through official channels lend resellers legitimacy but also open them up to the risk of red tape and competition from the "grey market", an amalgam of market challengers spanning legal and illegal importers as well as counterfeiters.

Goods make their way over from countries like Thailand and Singapore. Some are fake - U Maxim Thaw Tint mentions "iPhones" that are Android devices in disguise - while Mr Leong said others could be refurbished, or used, sets.

"We have a big problem with the grey market," mDrive owner U Myat Htoo said. He added that grey market players generally do not pay taxes while official resellers do.

U Maxim Thaw Tint also said processes around getting to market might bump prices up over grey market ones. At Wai Yan Electronics, iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 Plus costs run from K790,000 to K1.125 million depending on model and memory. Meanwhile, unauthorised reseller Aikon said prices ranged from US\$700 to US\$1100.

Pranam Dhoj Joshi, general manager of Apple distributor Lotus Technology - also behind authorised service provider iPro - called market competition cutthroat. "People here in Myanmar are very cost-driven," he said. "Whenever they go to any authorised reseller ... they tend to see that prices in authorised reseller shops are a bit [more] expensive than what they can find outside."

Resellers say they differentiate from the grey market on service.

"For us, I'm not concerned at all because there's a clear differentiation between what we're offering to the customers and what the grey is offering," Daw Khine Thit Lwin said. "But I have to say until now most Myanmar customers can't differentiate the value of what we're offering as an authorised reseller yet."

Retailers talked about earlier experiences operating in the grey market, with one saying his organisation had previously brought "about 30 iPhones over in [a] pocket". Meanwhile, U Thaw Tint had been a parallel importer whose original product sales had been above board in the legal sense but ran against Apple policy. "If you pay custom duty, if you pay import tax, according to Myanmar open-market economy law you can legally import anything as long as you pay for it and you are not advertising something [to be] what it's not," he said.

Apple's policies mean parallel importers might have an edge on

Yangon electricity board to receive its first budget

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YANGON City Electricity Supply Board (YESB) will have its own budget beginning April 1 as part of a government-wide process of professionalising state-owned firms.

YESB and other state firms are under pressure to transform the enterprises into professional businesses and separate them from day-to-day control by government departments.

YESB has officially begun corporatising since 2014 with the aim of eventually becoming privatised. The board provides electricity to Yangon, which uses about 50 percent of nationwide energy.

YESB vice president U Maung Maung Latt said it will remain 100pc government owned for the time being, but its practices are being updated with the separate budget.

"We will keep to the corporatisation practice in line with business standards," he said.

Last year, the board had made tentative steps toward privatisation, inviting several private companies to discuss the alternative. However, under guidance from its parent organisation the Ministry of Electric Power, officials eventually decided to pursue corporatisation first.

"It will take four or five years to get used to operating well as a corporation,"

said U Maung Maung Latt. "Later we will discuss the next step of private participation in YESB."

He did not provide more detailed information regarding the size of the independent budget or operation of YESB.

The board is the main regulator in Yangon as well as being responsible for electricity distribution in the city.

It buys electricity from Myanma Electric Power Enterprise at K60 a kilowatt hour, generating a monthly income of K31 billion (US\$30 million) after a move last year to increase the price for consumers.

Before the tariff hike it generated monthly revenues of about K20 billion.



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Kyauktada Township, Yangon,

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Dated: 2 March 2015



Rice bags are loaded onto a truck at a Yangon jetty. Photo: Kaung Htet

No rice firms join latest race for China exports



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THE Myanmar Rice Federation's second deadline of February 27 has passed for companies aiming for permission to export rice to China – but unlike in the first round, no bids were submitted, according to federation joint secretary U Soe Tun.

The second round was launched after the federation's previous list of nine chosen companies were criticised as inexperienced, with China asking for more choices.

China has quickly grown from being a marginal market for rice exports half a decade ago to today being Myanmar's most important rice buyer. However, the trade has been illegal from Beijing's point of view, and negotiations are ongoing to legalise it.

The decision to pre-select a handful of Myanmar rice traders will allow Chinese authorities to more easily make sure the export rice meets their health standards. After legalising the trade, rice will be exported by the selected

firms using ships to China's eastern seaboard along with the current method of shipping overland through Muse in northern Shan State.

The Myanmar Rice Federation has come under criticism for the nine firms it had selected to take part in the trade, drawing complaints in social media and from rival traders that several of the companies were unknowns with little track record in the industry, while a number of capable firms had been skipped. One leading rice trader told *The Myanmar Times* on condition of anonymity that after seeing the initial list, the Chinese side demanded inclusion from more companies with the capability to export large volumes of high-quality rice from Myanmar.

"Some of the chosen companies have not even received business registrations," he said.

Over 100 local companies applied for the first round of rice export licences in January, but China had initially requested less than 10 firms receive licences.

U Soe Tun did not offer an explanation as to why the second round of applications did not receive the amount of interest as the first, though he said that selection criteria was the same.

The first nine companies selected

were MAPCO, Myanmar Rice Mill, FPR from the Myanmar Rice Traders Association, Golden Land East Asia, MRDC from Mandalay, a company from Yangon's Bayintnaung commodities market still to be formed, Ayer-Pathein company from Ayeyarwady Region, SPRDC formed by Muse traders and Rakhine Ethnic Rice Company.

Myanmar Rice Federation officials previously said they hope the official trade to China to start at the end of April or early May. The chosen companies must register, while having their rice tested and performance measured before the trade can officially begin.

In 2013, Myanmar exported about 1.27 million tonnes of rice, of which about 747,000 tonnes went to China. In 2010 the country exported about 489,000 tonnes, of which 4000 tonnes went to China.

State media reported that China's largest state-run grain-trading company COFCO signed a memorandum of understanding in February on purchasing Myanmar's rice exports, depending on approval from China's general administration of quality supervision, inspection and quarantine. There will also be a business matching event in March for Chinese and Myanmar firms, the *Global New Light of Myanmar* report added.

Shifting focus for energy policy

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THE national energy policy needs to be more transparent to provide more information and better focused on the populations' needs, according to experts.

Only 50 percent of the government's energy plans is publically available, said David Allan, an adviser to non-profit group Spectrum.

"We do not get any other information about the government's policies or planning," he said in an energy conference partly organised by Spectrum on February 27.

There are a number of key documents which do not enter the public domain, said Mr Allan. He added that for instance the Ministry of Finance or the President's Office could publish a pre-budget statement as a publically available document in an effort to help spread information.

"The government said [there will be] 100 percent electrification by 2030, but

there is no information about funding," he said. "The World Bank's fund is only 5pc of the total, leaving open the question of where the rest of the money will come from.

Previous energy projects have also been mired by concerns of a lack of transparency, human rights abuse, land loss, inadequate compensation, no perceived benefit for local people and increased militarisation in project areas, according to speakers at the

'We know energy policies made now will define Myanmar's next few decades.'

U Soe Thein

Minister for the President's Office

two-day conference.

Government officials said there have been changes to how authorities are creating energy policy.

"We know energy policies made now will define Myanmar's next few decades. We must design policy with the actual needs of our citizens and future generations in mind," said Minister for the President's Office U Soe Thein.

Only one-quarter of citizens have access to electricity, one of the lowest rates in Asia, even though there is an abundance of natural resources including energy.

The government's current approach is centralised planning, large-scale planning and an emphasis on exports, which experts say may not be in the interests of long-term development.

"People-centric energy policy focuses on different approaches," said Mr Allan. Renewable energy projects are particularly important in rural areas, as they do not see benefit from large and expensive national grid and hydro-power projects.

Corporate rules need improving

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STRONG corporate governance is essential for companies to succeed on the Yangon Stock Exchange when it launches - and local companies have a lot to do to be up for the challenge.

The market is slated to launch in the third quarter 2015, and whether it survives depends on corporate governance, or the processes businesses use to direct activity, according to speakers at the Corporate Governance Forum Myanmar on February 17.

Speakers at the forum - which was put on by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants; audit, tax and advisory firm KMPG; the Myanmar Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the UK-Myanmar Financial Services Taskforce - stressed the need for strong mechanisms and procedures to run companies.

"Good corporate governance ... can lock in growth, make it stronger and more sustainable, and it's one of the most important factors behind the development of a healthy economy," said Alan Yarrow, alderman and Lord Mayor of London.

"Stock exchanges, for example, live and die on the strength of corporate governance."

Malaysia member of parliament Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said that well-implemented corporate governance builds trust in capital markets, confidence which will aid these markets to grow even more. Whether the Yangon Stock Exchange sinks or swims comes down to how companies run, he added.

"The development of a market economy in Myanmar depends on the development of the Yangon Stock Exchange," he said. "The development of the Yangon Stock Exchange depends on the accountability of its companies."

Nur Jazlan Mohamed also quoted the president's economic adviser U Aung Tun Thet in saying that only about five of 200 domestic public companies currently meet required listing standards set by ASEAN and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - making only 2.5 percent of the country's public companies currently eligible to list on its exchange.

Investment and investor confidence is also tied to corporate governance.

Good corporate governance hinges on principles like accountability, transparency and predictability. It can also mean doing business in accordance with ethics rather than technicalities - or loopholes - of the law.

Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business director Vicky Bowman said good corporate governance is related to behaviours that define two things: whether you're going to get your social licence to operate - or society's approval for your operations - and whether you're going to attract local business partners.

"Both of those are fundamental to your bottom line," she added, pointing to the Letpadaung copper as an example of corporate governance gone wrong. Ms Bowman said the firm should have done more to engage with stakeholders, disclose information and establish risk management structures.

Some officials from leading local companies say they are aware of the changing business landscape.

"Corporate governance for our bank is not something that is nice to have anymore," said Kanbawza Bank managing director Daw Kim Chawso on a panel at the event. "It's a must have." The bank educates its employees on topics such as conflicts of interest and anti-corruption.

"I don't think corporate governance is a to-do list," she said. "I think it's a journey that everybody needs to go on."

Small spike in taxi registrations



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A PUBLICITY campaign by the Yangon Supervisory Committee for Motor Vehicles to register taxis has had some effect, though there is a long way to go until the city's 55,131 taxis are registered, said committee chair U Hla Aung.

In the month of January about 290 taxis registered, leading the committee - which is commonly known by its Myanmar acronym Ma Hta Tha - to begin speaking out about the need to register.

The first half of February saw nearly 500 taxis register - an improvement, but still only about 1 percent of the number of cabs thought to ply their trade in Yangon. There are currently about 2000 taxis registered with Ma Hta Tha since it took over the responsibility.

"We can say the number jumped because of the media," said U Hla Aung.

On a per day basis, in January about 40 taxis were registering, though at present the figure is closer to 70.

Taxi drivers have complained they



A taxi driver ponders. Some drivers have complained of red tape with registrations. Photo: Staff

are forced to register their cabs with three different government authorities, and many have steered clear of Ma Hta Tha.

The organisation took over its taxi-registering duties from YCDC on October, but U Hla Aung said many taxi owners and drivers thought they could get away without registering.

"As soon as the responsibility was transferred from YCDC to us, the

rumour started spreading that taxis didn't need to be registered on a city level," he said. "I think the move made taxi drivers confused and they didn't want to do it. They thought they had already registered at the Road Transport Administration Department and didn't see any benefit from city taxi registration."

"Although the number is growing, there are still a lot of taxis left to

register," he said.

Not all the paper trail is in order, with many registered taxis not re-registering when ownership is transferred. Ma Hta Tha officials are currently checking its documents to figure out exactly which firms are registered.

U Hla Aung said passengers and the public will be able to benefit from more orderly control of taxis.

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Telcos extend services beyond cities

Two latest entrants balance marketing and coverage as they branch outside Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw



JEREMY MULLINS

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IT is easy to forget the excitement in Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw when Ooredoo and then Telenor launched their services, promising a new era in telecommunications. Already those launches have started to fade from memory.

K1500 SIM cards, quality phone connections and zippy internet are now close to the norm for urban dwellers. But while Yangonites, Mandalayans and residents of Nay Pyi Taw have had the choice of Telenor, Ooredoo and MPT for six months, that is far from the case elsewhere in the country.

Myanmar's telecoms race is in full swing. Tower companies are rapidly putting steel in the ground further and further from the largest cities, while fibre and microwave links are connected, generators fired up and equipment switched on.

In these regional cities and smaller towns, it is like August or September 2014 all over again. While MPT is already established in most of these places, their foreign competitors are now now reaching areas like Mawlamyine in Mon State, Bago in Bago Region or Hpa-an in Kayin State (see related article below).

This rapid expansion is bringing mobile services to people at an incredible rate. Deputy telecoms minister U Thang Tin told parliament last month that about 3 percent of the population was connected in 2011, rising to about 30pc at the end of 2014.

Frost and Sullivan telecoms industry analyst and consultant Naveen Mishra said penetration rates are set to keep rising, pointing to regional markets like

Indonesia where they are above 100pc.

Industry insiders say there are no signs yet that the pace of the rollout is slowing.

"2014-15 will be the fastest build years," said Ooredoo Myanmar CEO Ross Cormack. "We'll double population coverage by the end of the year, which will mean a quadrupling of the number of sites across the country. It's a huge build this year."

Both foreign operators previously pointed to challenges in a number of areas, including delays in approvals to put up towers. Mr Cormack said Ooredoo's rollout is now running much more smoothly. "Everybody's used to us, we've [become] used to dealing with all the requests you get from local communities - and we're very sensitive to where we build."

Now that the telcos are switching on towers across the country, they are matching it with localised marketing campaigns to let local customers know they have arrived in town.

"As we go out to new geographies, we bring our messages," said Mr Cormack in a January interview. "We were in Mawlamyine the other day. We said we are here, we would love you to try out our services, these are the types of services you can expect."

Mr Cormack said there is something of a "crescendo" of messaging as each new area is switched on.

The firm uses a balance of advertising, which changes depending on the location - mixing in "above the line" advertising, such as advertisements on the streets and in mass media, and "below the line" advertising, such as Facebook, leaflets, electronic media and word of mouth.

Also important is the firm's PR efforts. It is not shy about highlighting the work it is doing in areas like education, health, entrepreneurial development and women in the communities.

The messaging has also evolved. "In



A monk checks out an Ooredoo SIM card.
Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

the very early days we were trying broad brush to get branding, to get your messages that you're here, that we're about telecommunications," said Mr Cormack.

While Ooredoo still conducts significant advertising much of its methods have become more focused. For instance, its Mawlamyine launch was

'Basic connectivity is not there yet, but it is improving.'

Naveen Mishra

Telecoms analyst and consultant

accompanied by a large degree of local advertising, such as fliers, T-shirts and giveaways, along with traditional "above-the-line" marketing.

A lot is riding on these rollouts. With Telenor, MPT and Ooredoo, it is a competitive three-horse race - slated to grow if another operator, such as YTP and Vietnam's Viettel, is able to enter.

The three existing telcos - four if MECTel, a partially army-owned operator, is also counted - all have different strategies.

Analyst Mr Mishra said Ooredoo for instance is using 100pc next-generation equipment, while Telenor is designing its service to follow the gradual evolution of telecoms users from voice to internet.

While there is a lot of pressure to

spread service quickly and snap up new subscribers, turning on a network too early - which ultimately disappoints users - is also to be avoided.

Telenor CEO Petter Furberg said he personally tested the network in Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State, before the firm's launch in the area. He walked the city, testing the signal in places where there is likely to be high traffic, such as inside the market, to decide if it was ready. Later the same day he visited Mawlamyine and felt more build was required before turning the network on.

Ultimately, Telenor's launch in Mawlamyine was pushed back by a couple of weeks. It is an approach the firm has used before: Its first launch in

MORE ON BUSINESS 31

KAYIN STATE

Plugging in and switching on Hpa-an

JEREMY MULLINS

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THE Telenor team that arrived in Hpa-an on February 17 made use of the full list of wheeled transportation that regularly travel local roads.

A coach bus carried a full crew of employees clad in Telenor blue from Yangon head office to Hpa-an in Kayin State. The next day, a total of 10 tuk-tuks carted the team into town for the day's activities. The tuk-tuk convoy was led by four branded motorbike outriders quite literally waving the flag.

But perhaps most impressive was a large truck, full to overflowing with Telenor balloons.

While the firm had actually switched on its network in the city a few weeks prior, the trip was an attempt to let the people of Hpa-an know Telenor had arrived. The efforts - and particularly the balloons -

seemed to be appreciated.

Telenor has made a point of targeting the mass market, and CEO Petter Furberg said the firm must show it pays attention to local areas.

"We don't only care only about Mandalay or Yangon or these big cities. We actually care about the [mass] market," he said. "This is where we're going to grow, and this is the market we're going to serve. And we meet customers, we talk to them and give some information, and provide some entertainment as well."

Its "Blue Wave" event brought the company's employees - who seemed to come from departments across the board, including vibrant marketing staff and more reticent IT workers - out to a foot tour of the city's main market, the opening of a Telenor Light House shop used for IT outreach to the community and to a branded concert held outside the local university. Each stop on the tour included lots of balloons. Handfuls. A truck-full, in fact.

Mr Furberg said one of the goals is also to

bring Telenor staff out of its headquarters to understand the people they are serving, how they are being served and whether the network is good enough.

The "Blue Wave" also aims to support its local distributor, providing some buzz that the blue-branded telco has arrived in town and begun coverage.

The firm has pursued a somewhat different approach to distribution than other telcos. Instead of only a handful of distributors - a model followed by most international telecoms firms - it currently has about 60, a number that will grow as coverage expands.

"The distributor is our local man. He is the one who is going to help us drive the sales and the distribution in Hpa-an," said Mr Furberg.

"His job is to visit [local shops] regularly, stock up, give them information, and of course he is also very happy that we have come here and create more awareness around the fact that we have launched."



Scenes from Telenor's Hpa-an "Blue Wave" event.
Photos: Aung Htay Hlaing



Apple allows iPhone sales

CONTINUED FROM BUSINESS 27

authorised resellers. "If there is already a local service provider who can take care of the warranty, actually it makes more business sense [to be a parallel importer]. I don't have to follow any of Apple's guidelines ... yet I get authentic products at a very good price with very good service."

Through legitimate routes or not, Apple iPhones have found their way into the Myanmar market.

"It's very hard to stop market forces and trends, no matter how big you are. There is a demand for iPhone in this market. And whether we supply or not, people will figure out a way to get it - and they are getting it," U Maxim Thaw Tint said. "It's just a matter of whether Apple wants to officialise its process, how quickly and in which manner."

Apple has decided, and iPhones have officially arrived in Myanmar - along with recognition that the country now offers a more mature mobile market.

Daw Khine Thit Lwin told *The Myanmar Times* after the iPhone launch that Wai Yan Electronics' four stores would have to re-up their stock the following day.

"This is [Apple's] hero product," she said. "For them to be in Myanmar and recognise it as one of the markets that is worth their hero product entering, I think that's something to be proud about."

Gmail arrives in local language



CATHERINE TRAUTWEIN

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GMAIL users now have the option to run it in Myanmar language, Google announced last week.

The move to extend Myanmar language support to Gmail, Google's email service, brings the firm closer to its goal of making language a non-issue on the internet, and is one of a number of company initiatives aimed at encouraging the exchange of information into and out of Myanmar.

The American search titan will also put on a local translation marathon February 28 under a new project surrounding Google Translate: "Love your Language".

Google operates under the mission of bringing all the world's information to everyone on earth, said Google product manager Divon Lan at a recent press conference in Yangon.

Of all the people online, almost half log on from Asia - yet more than a third of the internet's information is still in one language: English, he said.

"For the internet to be useful

to this guy selling something on the streets, and let's say he doesn't speak any English ... it has to be Myanmar language," Mr Lan said. "There's no other option."

More local language resources are an important ingredient in making sure Myanmar users get more from the internet. Google has also been working with its translation tools with the aim of making the internet language-agnostic.

"What we are trying to do at Google ... is make languages not matter in the sense that it doesn't matter what language you speak, you should be able to [access] all the information in the world," Mr Lan said. "Google Translate is in the centre of that ideal."

The seeds for modern machine translation started with computer scientists that examined languages' grammatical structures for switching between tongues. The system resulted in weak translations because "an academic description of the language is only an approximation of the real language", or how people speak and write it, Mr Lan said.

Instead of turning to high school-style language rules, Google searches out and finds "parallel texts" - written words in two languages that should have equivalent

meanings. Scoping out patterns using these texts turns out better translations than previously, according to Mr Lan.

However, Myanmar lacks an abundance of these texts, which Google requires to run these translations. It's still early days for the service.

The corporation rolled out Google Translate support for Myanmar language in December. Mr Lan said earlier the project - a start-and-stop, global, distributed effort - started years ago. Translate debuts when it arrives at the "alpha" stage, or when translations give readers the general idea of what

foreign text says; though today they aren't word-perfect, due to a dearth in Myanmar language text online.

This is where community members can help. Mr Lan said users' corrections improve translation quality.

The company hopes to rope native Myanmar speakers into the translation effort through a marathon, run in two three-hour blocks at 10am and 1pm on February 28 at Phandeyar, a downtown innovation lab.

"This is actually the first time we're having a big Google-led event and we hope to get a much higher volume of contributions," Mr Lan said.

During the era of American sanctions on Myanmar, Google could not fully engage with the country due to legal restrictions. The country's web users will have a much wider reach as it becomes increasingly connected.

"This is about bringing all the world's information to Myanmar, but it's also about bringing Myanmar information to the world," Mr Lan said. "Myanmar is a country with a very long, rich history, a very, very unique culture ... All of that information now is locked in the borders of Myanmar."

Not for long, if Google has its say.

'Myanmar is a country with a very long, rich history ... All of that information is now locked in the borders of Myanmar.'

Divon Lan

Google products manager

CONTINUED FROM BUSINESS 30

September was confined to Mandalay, delaying its Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon launches until October to ensure quality coverage.

Mr Furberg said that early on, people were asking why the firm was so quiet in terms of marketing. "We have been very deliberate in not building up expectations because they were very high [before launching]," he said.

Telenor has targeted the mass market. Mr Furberg said it focuses on customers who previously could not afford to be connected, but now can be because of its lower prices.

"In the beginning it's all about messaging that we are turning on the network and we are coming with affordable SIM cards and affordable services, internet and voice, and nothing more really," he said. "That's pretty much what we can promise today and to start talking about other more sophisticated services, I think we will do as we see the markets have matured."

In three months to the end of 2014, Telenor signed up 3.4 million subscribers, of which 40pc are daily active data users. MPT's Takashi Nagashima claimed 11 million active subscribers in a January interview. Ooredoo Group has not yet released figures for the fourth quarter of 2014, though the figure is likely to be in the millions.

Analyst Mr Mishra said within a very short period of time, data use will rapidly increase, driven by customer demand for applications like Facebook and WhatsApp, as well as services for a particular market segment. He pointed to figures from Telenor showing 40pc of its users use data daily as a sign that people are looking to get online.

"If price points are good, we will see a spike in the use of internet," he said. "Basic connectivity is not there yet, but it is improving."

While Yangonites and Mandalayans may now be used to the idea of competition in the mobile services marketplace, the majority of Myanmar's population is still waiting for either a challenger to MPT or their first telco to roll into town.

Which of the three - or four - operators ultimately pulls ahead may depend on any number of factors, but marketing is important to let future customers know that services have arrived.

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Populism forces action on world inequality

A YEAR after Thomas Piketty's investigation into global inequality captured the attention of the world's economic thinkers, policy makers in political-monopoly states are taking his lessons to heart in their annual budgets.

Governments in South Africa, Hong Kong and Singapore adopted a decidedly populist bent last week, expanding help for lower-income households and, in some cases, boosting levies on the wealthier members of society. China, which has taken steps to strengthen its health-care and social security programs in recent years, releases its budget next month.

The moves reflect in part social tensions that have risen as inequality climbed. Singapore, dominated by one party for 50 years, faces a potential election this year. Hong Kong, whose leaders are overseen by Communist China, saw a surge in protests last year, while South Africa saw economic growth hurt by labor strikes.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we see more of this," said Shang Jin Wei, chief economist at the Asian Development Bank in Manila. "Thomas Piketty's book inspired interest into looking into this issue and therefore increasing taxes is partly a response to that."

In Singapore, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's government on February 23 announced its first increase in decades to the top income-tax rate, to help pay for a new benefit for low-income elderly. Rival finance hub Hong Kong

said on February 25 it will provide extra allowances for the poor and elderly.

South Africa is raising income taxes for the first time in two decades, mainly targeting wealthy earners. The tax rate will increase by 1 percentage point for all taxpayers except the lowest earners.

China's leaders may join such initiatives, according to Mr Wei - he highlights that the tax system in the nation ruled by the Communist Party since 1949 favours the wealthy by not taxing capital gains or inheritance.

"China's tax system is more favourable to the rich than America's tax system," he said. "Over time I expect China to adjust its tax system towards a global norm."

According to the ADB, while Asia has enjoyed two decades of rapid economic growth and halved the number of people living in extreme poverty, income inequality rose by 20pc. China's gross domestic product grew by an average of around 10pc a year between 1990 and

2012. The country's Gini coefficient, a gauge of inequality, increased to above 0.47 in recent years, from below 0.3 in the 1970s, according to the ADB.

The global debate on the socio-economic disparities may be gaining steam. This month, Group of 20 finance chiefs for the first time highlighted income inequality across the world as a growing concern.

"In some countries, potential growth has declined, demand continues to be weak, the outlook for jobs is still bleak and income inequality is rising," the G-20 said in a statement after finance ministers and central bankers held talks in Istanbul.

That move was significant from a body that was tasked with coordinating international economic policy in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. It came after the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development calculated that the gap between rich and poor is at its highest level in more than three decades.

Further political pressure may come later this year, when the UN General Assembly is scheduled to adopt a new agenda to succeed the Millennium Development Goals, which will include targets on tackling inequality.

Governments may still fall short of what Mr Piketty advocates. In a recent blog post, he reiterated that a worldwide levy on individual net worth would offer the best solution to rising inequality. - Bloomberg

'Thomas Piketty's book inspired interest into looking into this issue.'

Shang Jin Wei
ADB economist

LONDON

Standard Chartered bosses leave after growth slowdown

BRITAIN'S troubled Standard Chartered announced on February 26 the exit of its top two bosses in a radical management reshuffle, as the Asia-focused bank battles to transform its fortunes.

The lender, facing sliding profits, slowing growth in emerging markets, and scandals including the alleged violation of US sanctions on Iran, said in a statement that chief executive Peter Sands will step down in June followed by chair John Peace next year.

Former JPMorgan investment bank head Bill Winters will replace Mr Sands at the group, which issued three profit warnings over the last 12 months that had sparked shareholder calls for a boardroom cull.

Jaspal Bindra, head of Asia, will also step down from the board in April and leave shortly afterwards.

Standard Chartered shares jumped more than 5.0 percent as investors welcomed the management shake-up at the group, which was fined last year for failing to detect possible money-laundering.

"After more than eight years as group chief executive, now is the right moment to hand over to new leadership," Mr Sands said in the shock statement.

"Bill and the team will inherit a more focused and efficient bank

with a superb client franchise and a unique network across some of the most dynamic markets in the world."

The outgoing chair praised Sands, who has been chief executive since 2006, saying he had presided "over a period of huge change and challenge for the entire industry".

"Bill is a globally respected banker and has the right experience and skills to drive the group's new phase of growth," Mr Peace added.

Standard Chartered, shirt sponsor of English Premier League football team Liverpool, managed to survive the 2008 global financial crisis without state assistance, unlike many of its peers.

However, the bank has suffered in recent times from a growth slowdown in emerging market economies in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the regions from which it makes about 90 percent of its profits.

"Bill Winters is an inspired choice and his experience with JP-Morgan will be invaluable in building on Standard Chartered's strong foundations," said Martin Gilbert, chief executive at key shareholder Aberdeen Asset Management.

"At its core it is a very good bank with a presence in some of the fastest growing parts of the world," he added. - AFP

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The Mekong Business Initiative (MBI), co-financed by the Government of Australia and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), will promote private sector development in the Greater Mekong Subregion. It will provide high quality policy advisory support and knowledge services to government and business associations on business regulatory reforms, access to financial services, and other important private sector development issues.

Myanmar will be a major beneficiary during the initial phase of project during 2015-2017. The MBI is currently hiring for the following position, to be based in Yangon, Myanmar:

MBI Myanmar Private Sector Development Coordinator (33 person-months)

Job purpose:

- Support technical experts to develop the MBI work program and conduct diagnostic work in areas of business regulatory and access to financial services.
- To liaise closely with Myanmar stakeholders to promote MBI activities to stakeholders, identify reform opportunities, and advocate for policy reforms in MBI strategic areas. This will be achieved through extensive dialogue with the government;
- To support advocacy by closely liaising with the private sector and civil society in Myanmar;
- To closely coordinate with other development partners with related programs and activities;
- To support the preparation and dissemination of MBI knowledge products;
- Manage administrative assistant.

Requirements:

- Tertiary degree in economics, business, finance or related subject, with at least 8 years of experience in working on policy issues, and 5 years of experience working on topics associated with the focus areas of the MBI;
- Strong networks across the Myanmar government and private sector;
- Capability of strategic thinking and ability to advocate and engage in policy discussions with senior representatives of the government and private sector.

Applicants should send cover letter and CV to MBIjob@adb.org. Please put Myanmar in the subject heading. Deadline for applications: **16 Mar 2015**.

The ADB aims to alleviate poverty in Asia and the Pacific by fostering sustained and inclusive growth.



INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND INTERPRETER/TRANSLATOR MYANMAR - ENGLISH ASSIGNMENTS IN MYANMAR

The International Monetary Fund is seeking Myanmar-based interpreter/translators to work under short-term contracts for its missions to Yangon and/or Naypyitaw as well as under long-term contracts for its technical assistance (TA) experts in Naypyitaw. Candidates must be professional interpreters with knowledge of economic terminology, capable of interpreting into Myanmar and English and producing final written translations into both languages in electronic format. Assignments with TA experts may also involve office support and administrative duties.

Short-listed candidates will be interviewed and asked to take interpretation and translation tests in Yangon.

Please send your CV listing your qualifications, interpretation and translation experience, and your complete contact information by **March 20, 2015** to languagecandidates@imf.org.

Attn: Mrs. Susana Eri, Chief Interpreter
(Subject line should contain "MMR-missions", "MMR-long-term projects", or both)

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1	Secretary to the Qatar Ambassador	Fluent in English (4skills)
2	Public Relation Officer	Fluent in English (4skills)
3	Assistant Public Relation Officer	Fluent in English (4skills)
4	Translator	Fluent in English, Myanmar & Arabic (4skills)
5	Driver	Basic English
6	Reporter	Fluent in English (4skills)
7	Hospitality Staff	Fluent in English (4skills)
8	Political Expert	Fluent in English & Arabic (4skills)
9	Media Expert	Fluent in English & Arabic (4skills)
10	Economist	Fluent in English & Arabic (4skills)

Interested candidates should send the detailed resume with salary expectation, recent passport-sized photo and Notice Period to Embassy of the State of Qatar, Yangon as below:

No.1, Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yankin Township, Yangon.

Otherwise, please pass your detailed resume at Sedona Hotel's Front Desk.

We regret that only shortlisted candidates will be notified.

JOB VACANCIES

Business Development Manager

Responsibilities

- To conduct market research on following areas:
 - Building materials, such as cement, steel bars, etc.
 - Spiral welded steel pipes for structural, marine piling and water conveyance application.
 - Polyethylene (PE) and High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) pipes for water conveyance application.
 (Market research scope and methodology will be disclosed only to the successful candidate)
- To promote company products and services.
- Research and identify potential customers for products or services.
- Develop sales plans to introduce products in new markets.
- Keep tab on industry news and trends, products, services, competitors, relevant information about legacy, existing, and emerging technologies, and the latest product-line developments.
- Visit prospective buyers at commercial, industrial, or other establishments to show samples or catalogues, and to inform them about product pricing, availability, and advantages.
- Attend trade shows and seminars to promote products or to learn about industry developments.

Requirements

1. A degree preferably in Civil / Structural / Mechanical Engineering, Physics, Mathematics, or Applied Sciences.
2. Must have minimum 5 years of working experience, preferably in the construction / metal works / manufacturing industry.
3. Knowledge in building materials, working experience in Sales / Marketing / Business Development will be an added advantage.
4. Members of Myanmar Engineering Society are encouraged to apply.
5. Must be able to work independently with minimal supervision and must be willing to travel.
6. Candidate must be fluent in English and must possess good business sense, organisation skills, and problem-solving skills.
7. Candidate must possess the ability to build relationships with local authorities and customers (both local and abroad) effectively.

Accountant

Responsibility

- Manage the day-to-day accounting & finance operation.
- Manage the financial and management accounting functions including control over and maintenance of all ledgers.
- Preparation of management reports, financial reports and financial analysis including analytical review to identify possibilities to close gaps.
- Preparation of projection, budget & forecast.
- Work closely with auditors to ensure timely completion of statutory audit & signing-off of clean audit report.
- Manage daily banking and treasury functions
- Manage various taxation & custom issues.

- Costing & cost management.
- Work closely with personnel within the organisation & liaison with various authorities (both domestic & central government) to ensure compliance in various aspects of the operation of the business.
- Risk management within the organisation, including but not limited to identification & minimisation of operational & financial risks.
- Assist in inventory management and physical stock count.

Requirements

1. Minimum Diploma or Bachelor Degree in Accounting. Those having completed or currently pursuing professional studies such as CIMA and ACCA are encouraged to apply.
2. Minimum 3 years of relevant working experience, preferably those with prior working experience in manufacturing environment
3. Must have sound knowledge of general accounting processes, able to handle full set of accounts, management reporting, financial reporting and financial analysis.
4. Strong analytical capability and attention to detail
5. Good command of English & Burmese.
6. PC literate with good hands-on skills on Microsoft and ERP applications.
7. Good inter-personal skills with ability to work independently within a team environment.
8. Able to multi-task, work under pressure and tight deadlines.
9. Experience in various treasury matters, dealing with company secretaries, internal & external auditors, tax consultants, lawyers, insurance brokers/agents and government authorities would be advantageous.

HR & Admin. Executive

Responsibilities

- To handle for all HR functions including payroll, recruitment, claims, compensation and benefits.
- To ensure the compliance with Myanmar Employment Act, Myanmar Government Legislation and Act, local authorities rules and regulations.
- To handle HR Administration functions including leave matters, medical matters, insurance matters, claims, personal file management and preparation of HR related letters.
- To ensure proper documentation, arrangement, correspondences, report, filling and records are consistent with office guidelines and procedures.
- To be responsible for overall administrative task, including general procurement to ensure its expenses is controlled within company's budget.
- To provide administration support in all administration spectrum including factory security and safety, office equipment maintenance, utilities, office stationery and others.
- To promote a platform which to facilities all level communication channel among or between the staff level and middle management as well as management level, with objective of creating a positive

working environment.

- To undertake ad-hoc assignments or duties assigned by superior/ Management when needed.

Requirements

1. At least a Diploma, Degree or Professional Degree in Business Studies /Administration / Human Resource Management or equivalent.
2. Must have minimum 5 years of working experience in the related field is required for this position.
3. Must be able to multi-task, work independently with minimal supervision and must be willing to travel.
4. Candidate must be fluent in English and must possess good communication skills, organisation skills, and problem-solving skills

Company Profile

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21/22 Bahosi Housing, Lanmadaw Township, Yangon.

Or you can email it to: catherine.cheong@spirolite.my

Only shortlisted candidates will be notified for an interview.

Property

BUSINESS EDITOR: Jeremy Mullins | jeremymullins7@gmail.com

Zoning plan in limbo as experts push for re-start



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YANGON'S zoning plan is due for a restart after contentious discussions meant the process had ground to a halt, according to U Toe Aung, urban planner with Yangon City Development Committee.

"The zoning plan was recently halted as we contended with foreign developers who wanted to build high-rises," he said.

Authorities may be hesitating on the plan, but it will eventually arrive as the government has pledged to put it in place, he added.

U Toe Aung said developers' attitudes are also beginning to change. Several years ago, many construction businesses wanted to build high-rises, but interest has somewhat disappeared as developers realised this is complicated by poor infrastructure in areas like utilities and roads.

Some projects, often with a foreign-owned component, are keen on high-rise projects though, necessitating the zoning plan. It must still be passed by the Yangon Region hluttaw to become law.

"When we started the zoning plan and began discussing a limit on high-rises, local developers didn't support that. They wanted to build developments with high-rises," he said. "Now they understand how difficult this is made by our infrastructure."

Some have said that when foreign developers proposed projects they are asking too much of the city and its weak infrastructure. Others have criticised zoning plan drafts as

being too restrictive for some developers.

Urban planners U Kyaw Latt said there are other considerations that go into approving high rises. With taller buildings comes more floor space. This means overcrowding - particularly as many owners of high-rise units also own cars.

Perhaps more importantly, though, the city may lose its character with tall buildings in the wrong place.

U Kyaw Latt said the goal of the zoning plan is draft rules for proper utilisation of urban land and limit high-rise buildings as part of a policy for "urbanisation in harmony". The draft zoning plan has received input from a number of organisations, including YCDC, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Science and Technology, Yangon Heritage Trust, the Association of Myanmar Architects and a team from the Japan International Cooperation Association.

'The government hasn't approved it yet so I think they don't want it.'

Daw Nyo Nyo Thin
Yangon Region MP

Urban planners are keen to see updated rules that make sense, given the rapid changes of Yangon. U Kyaw Latt said about 60 percent of the project is complete, with plans submitted to Yangon Region government, though confirmation has been delayed.

"The process of approving the zoning plan was almost finished by

the government, but then it was left alone and the process stopped," he said. "However, we will make sure it is totally finished."

Observers say Yangon Region has not provided a reason as to why it has not been passed, other than the zoning plan is not ready to be put into place.

"We have finished drawing up the draft zoning plan and submitted it to the Regional government. But they responded that the time is not right," said Daw Moe Moe Lwin, director at Yangon Heritage Trust. "We urge continued work on the zoning plan."

Yangon Region member of parliament Daw Nyo Nyo Thin said she thinks there may be little willingness to support the plan on the part of the government, as MPs have constantly raised the issue with no avail.

"The government hasn't approved it yet so I think they don't want it," she said.

While the government has signed on in principle to the zoning plan, it has not yet followed through on it.

"We have explained the zoning plan to the government many times and in many ways. We have explained our urban heritage must be preserved and must not disappear," she said.

"They also said that they will enforce it, but not yet, so they are breaking their commitment."

Daw Nyo Nyo Thin also called on developers, whether local or foreign, to respect the spirit of the plan. The property business is dependent on the public to purchase condos and houses, so must respect their wishes.

"In the previous era, businesses could do whatever they want if they have peace with the government, but the country will not be like that soon," she said. "If they try to do whatever they like with the government's help, the future won't be good."

Amenities dropped to make housing project cheaper

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YANGON Region will be home to another low-cost housing project, as governing authorities work to find accommodation for the city's growing population.

To be developed by Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC), officials say it will be the cheapest per unit of the recent slate of low-cost projects, as a number of amenities like elevators will be left out of the design.

Located at the corner of Zizawha and Setmhu roads in Yangon's Shwepyitha township, the four buildings will be six stories each, according to U Nay Win, deputy director of YCDC's Department of Engineering.

Construction is just about to start, with units ultimately to be made available at the end of 2015 - though it remains to be seen whether the space will be sold or rented out.

"The low-cost housing is to happen this budget year, and we are starting now. But no decision has been reached on whether it will be sold or rented - if we make a decision, there will be an announcement," he said.

While no decision has been reached, if sold the units will be priced around K10 million (US\$9700) - well below other similar low-cost housing ventures announced recently, he added.

Building the four structures will cost K1.83 billion (US\$1.7 million), with a road, fence, park and electricity equipment costing another K256 million in total.

Yangon City Development Committee has been building low-cost housing projects in Yangon's outskirts, including the larger Bo Ba

Htoo and Bo Min Yaung projects in North Dagon township. Those projects ultimately ended up being priced higher than what YCDC is pledging for the Shwepyitha project.

U Nay Win said the two North Dagon projects were outfitted with electricity, car parking and elevators in keeping with modern design, which made them slightly more expensive.

"We carried out our plans intending to make Bo Ba Htoo and Bo Min Yaung low-cost housing, but when we built them with quality facilities, they turned out not to be low-cost," he said. "That's why we call them 'fair cost', as the price was expensive per square foot. But still, compared to privately-owned apartments, those ones were cheap."

For a building to be considered low-cost, the average construction cost per square foot must be below K20,000, meaning a 500-square-foot apartment would cost K10 million, he said. U Nay Win added that the low-cost label does not excuse shoddy or unsafe work.

Providing electricity for the Shwepyitha project is particularly expensive.

"That's why low-cost housing are not very low prices, but it is fair compared to others. Shwepyitha housing will be cheap, but facilities won't be better than previous projects," he said.

Many of YCDC's low-cost projects are built together with a private company, as YCDC does not have the budget for this kind of operation. Shwepyitha will be financed directly by YCDC, giving it more control over the project.

Bo Ba Htoo, Bo Min Yaung and Shwepyitha are all to be finished by the end of the year.

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HOUSE OF THE WEEK

Moving into a memorable home

With so many of Yangon's houses being built from the same mold, it is nice to see one with a bit of character.

This week's home on Thazin Phyu street in Yankin is large enough for an extended family while providing a quiet environment. It's also reasonably priced, and memorably decorated inside and out.

There are three master bedrooms inside the 5200-square-foot building, along with two smaller bedrooms, a living room, shrine, dining room, kitchen and four bathrooms.

It also includes two large balconies and plenty of windows to capture the breeze.

It's a three-storey structure on a 2400 square foot compound, which has room left over for a small garden and a car park.

This house is fully furnished and includes the usual amenities like air conditioners, power, featuring hot and cold water in the kitchen.

You'll be a little further from downtown than some would like, but the location may be suitable for others with different commuting habits.

The price is directly negotiable with the owner. If you are looking for



a nice house, this is a memorable choice to make your own.

- Tin Yadanar Tun

Location : Thazin Phyu Street, Yankin township
Price : \$3000 per month (negotiable)
Contact : Estate Myanmar Enterprise Ltd.
Phone : 09-43118787
09-43031699

“For now, we are not able to do anything and we are disappointed that we can’t fulfill our customer needs.”

- City Mart official on alcohol being taken off the shelves

Caste system continues in the Indian subcontinent

WORLD 41



IN PICTURES

Employees of the Indian Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) work on the construction of a tunnel in New Delhi. The Indian government has been under intense pressure to fulfill promised reforms to grow the economy after winning the biggest mandate in 30 years at last year’s elections. *Photo: AFP*

CANBERRA

Australian fee for its foreign buyers

FOREIGN investors will have to pay new fees to buy Australian real estate, Prime Minister Tony Abbott said on February 25, under a proposal which includes a crackdown on illegal purchases.

Cashed-up foreigners, many from China, have been blamed for driving up prices in Australian property markets, particularly Sydney and Melbourne, and placing home ownership out of reach of many locals.

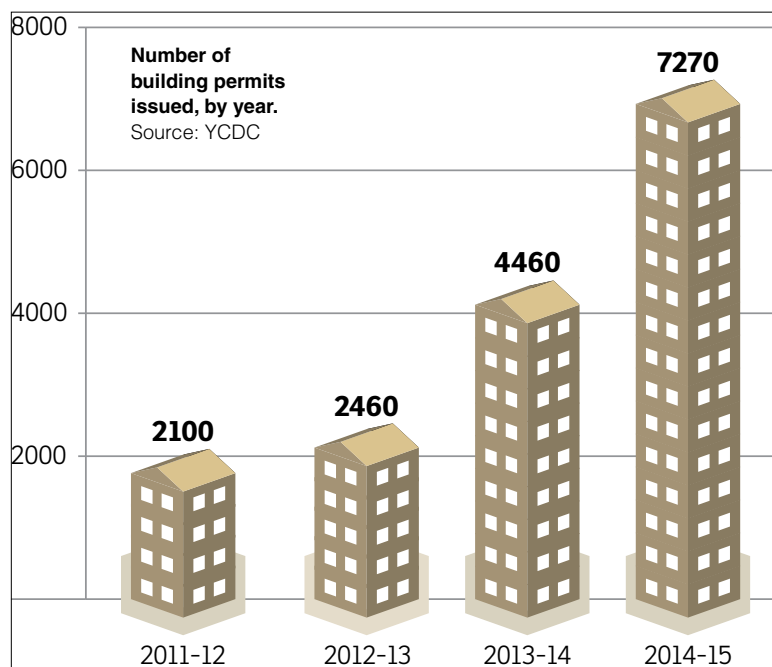
“Part of the Australian dream is owning your own home and we certainly want the dream to continue,” Mr Abbott said at a press conference.

“Yes, foreign investment has been very, very good for Australia but it’s got to be the right foreign investment ... and it can’t disadvantage Australian home buyers,” he said.

The government is proposing charging an application fee on all foreign investments, similar to a scheme already operating in New Zealand.

Under the plan, any foreign investor who wants to buy a residential property worth less than A\$1 million (US\$784,500) will have to pay an A\$5000 application fee.

This would rise by A\$10,000 for every extra million dollars in the purchase price. - AFP



Large increase in building permits

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CONTRACTORS have lined up at Yangon City Development Committee for building permits after the committee demolished several buildings being constructed without permits, according to a senior official.

So far in 2014-15 the department has roughly doubled the number of building permits it has given out to 7270 compared to the year earlier, said Department of Engineering (Building) deputy director U Nay Win.

“Within the month of January, 699 builders applied for permits. It’s a strong result from previously many buildings going up without building and contractor licences,” he said. “We

are taking care and continuing action.”

The figure of 7270 permits is a significant increase on previous years. In 2011-12, just 2100 building permits were given out, and 2460 in 2012-13. In 2013-14, 4460 buildings received permits.

“Last year many of the problems came from buildings going up in the

‘Last year many of the problems came from buildings going up in the outskirts.’

U Nay Win
Yangon City Development Committee

outskirts of Yangon without permits. That’s why we took effective action, and the problem is going away,” he said.

Of the 7270 permitted buildings, about 3000 are between five and eight storeys. There are 89 buildings between nine and 12 storeys, and 34 above 12 storeys.

Building permits are only one step in the approvals process to build in Yangon, which can also include direction from the Myanmar Investment Commission.

The Department of Engineering has pledged to turn around submitted proposals within 14 days if the forms are correctly filled out. Once proposals are approved, they go to Yangon City Development Committee’s executive committee for the final green light.

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AppExpo 2015 sees thousands attend in third year running

ABOUT 2500 people attended this year's AppExpo at MICT Park February 19-20.

The event, aimed at an industry audience, saw steady levels of attendees over last year, according to Yangon Hertz Media CEO U Zaw Zaw Myo Lwin. The expo puts a wide range of tech community members in one place,

gathering the likes of software houses, developers, and software importers and connecting them with startup freelance developers and more, AppExpo's website said. Exhibitors ranged from Samsung to local startup, Nex, according to its website.

"I saw Ho Ho De De application, which links taxi driver and passengers, and I saw Happy application [for] health, beauty, news and more," said Ko Kyaw Phyto, an App Expo 2015 attendee.

While a "Best application 2015" competition had been in the works - and received more than 30 submissions - U Zaw Zaw Myo Lwin said since professionals and beginners ran in the same category a winner could not be named.

In its third year running, AppExpo will return next year "with a unique plan", U Zaw Zaw Myo Lwin said.

- Aung Kyaw Nyunt

THOUSAND
2.5

Attendees at AppExpo 2015

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We, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Myanmar Office, are looking for one Programme Manager, one Media Officer and one Programme Assistant. If you are interested, please visit our website at <http://www.fnfasia.org/gallery/fnfmyanmar/> or contact Biak-Hlei.Sung@fnst.org. The application forms will be accepted only until 22nd March, 2015.

Department for International Development 
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The Department for International Development (DFID) is currently looking to recruit a highly motivated and energetic individual to join our team as a **Peacebuilding Adviser**.
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The deadline for submission of applications is on **12 March 2015**.

 **LOCALS ONLY POSITION**
Pact, a U.S based INGO with operations throughout Myanmar, is currently seeking an experienced and dedicated candidate for the position below.
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• Demonstrable experience in working with a wide range of media, preparing press releases, editing and producing publications, and managing social media platforms
• Computer literate in both Microsoft and Apple operating systems, with strong technical skills including experience with video editing, photography, and production of layouts and graphics in Adobe InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator
NB: This position is for Myanmar nationals only.
Detailed job description including requirements for the position is available at the Pact office or www.themimu.info/jobs/index.php. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted. Interested and qualified candidates can send their application letter, CV, one passport-sized photo and references to:
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Tel: 09-8553198; 373221, 378931 & 245447 (Ext: 78, 73)
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Sticking it to hate speech



CATHERINE TRAUTWEIN

newroom@mmtimes.com

A PROMINENT local campaign combating hate speech has unveiled shareable Facebook stickers for the Myanmar market encouraging users not to "start fires" and to think before sharing.

The illustrated character stickers, which made their debut February 17, represent the latest manoeuvre from the "Panzagar" campaign in its offline and online struggle to stem the tide of hate speech in Myanmar. They are also Myanmar's first on Facebook, according to Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO) executive director Ko Nay Phone Latt, who founded the campaign.

Facebook, as a tool, can be used toward good or evil ends - while some might exploit the platform to spread hate and dangerous speech, the Facebook-born Panzagar campaign uses it to promote conscientiousness.

The movement, called "Flower Speech" in English, started last year with a Facebook page and some drawings in response to hate and dangerous speech that threatened to lead to offline violence, said MIDO program manager Ma Htaike Htaike Aung. The organisation, attuned to ICT, took particular notice of this speech on Facebook.

The group called for partners through its page, and in response Panzagar became a grassroots movement, Ma Htaike Htaike Aung continued.

Prior to the stickers, Panzagar and Facebook had been planning to join forces to fight hate and dangerous speech on the internet.

"We believe in freedom of expression as well as internet freedoms, so we don't want the online platform to be seen as a negative space," Ma Htaike Htaike Aung said.

The organisations had been putting their heads together over Facebook's reporting mechanism, which has been decried by some as ineffective but presents particular challenges in Myanmar due in part to language constraints, according to Ma Htaike Htaike Aung.

But after riots erupted in Mandalay - potentially fuelled by rumours of a rape that spread on the site, as previously reported by *The Myanmar Times* - Panzagar saw the chance for Facebook to up its game; so the organisation introduced the idea for stickers.

The stickers on the site aren't the first Panzagar brought to Facebook, with some cut along the way. Since the beginning, the campaign has worked with a small group of artists called Joosk whose first draft of character designs didn't go over well with certain camps of people.

"They are very crazy into Japanese anime, so they created images which looked like Japanese cartoon characters," she said, curving her hands to indicate a buxom figure.

"We got some feedback from

'We don't want the online platform to be seen as a negative space.'

Ma Htaike Htaike Aung
Program manager, MIDO



MIDO executive director Nay Phone Latt says

women's groups, because, you know," she said jokingly.

Facebook also had feedback. Ma Htaike Htaike Aung said the company spiked one of the stickers, an elderly woman in a pointed straw hat, which they felt could be seen as racist outside of Myanmar.

U Thet Paing Ka of the Joosk team said the stickers were created "with Myanmar style", and Ma Htaike Htaike Aung pointed out the illustrations wear thanaka and longyi. More stickers may be on the way, including ones that represent different ethnic groups in Myanmar.

While the stickers currently remain restricted to the Myanmar Facebook store, the site has plans to make

Solar-powered plane to stop in M

CATHERINE TRAUTWIEN
newsroom@mmtimes.com

A RECORD-SETTING solar-powered plane will make a brief stop in Mandalay on its way around the world, speakers announced at a February 24 press conference.

The aircraft's five-month, 35,000-kilometre (21,750-mile) journey starts in Abu Dhabi in March, with Mandalay the fourth stop on its schedule. With their Solar Impulse 2 (Si2) plane, Swiss innovators Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg seek to get around the globe on nothing but the sun's energy, and to spread the good word on green technology.

Mr Piccard has said Myanmar is opening itself with new technologies, and officials at a recent Yangon press event forecasted a future for the country in clean tech.

"The first ever round-the-world solar flight, Solar Impulse 2, will inspire energy and technology innovations in Myanmar, spreading a pioneering spirit among youth and mobilising enthusiasm for renewable energies," said deputy transport minister U Zin Yaw.

"Although Myanmar is a country blessed with many natural resources, there is still need for conservation to make the future more secure for coming generations. It is important for us to also identify technologies that allow us to promote sustainable energy," said U Linn Myaing, chief operating officer of the Mandalay layover's local partner First Myanmar Investment (FMI). "Solar Impulse 2 reminds us that persistence and imagination leads to innovation and technology."



Si2 is scheduled to land in Mandalay on March 10. Photo: Supplied/ © Solar Impulse

Switzerland-based Solar Impulse SA approaches potential perpetual motion with its aircraft. If it weren't for its human pilots, Si2 could theoretically fly forever - even by night, according to media representatives.

The plane's solar cells transform what the sun gives off into electricity, which keeps the engines going and recharges the plane's batteries for later, "making the concept of perpetual flight more realistic", said media relations assistant Marc Baumgartner.

However, humans need breaks, and the single-seater plane will alternately host Mr Piccard and Mr Borschberg.

In transit, the pilots can't catch

any shuteye over populated areas, said head of media relations Claudia Durgnat. However, "we have developed techniques to relax the body while remaining awake", she said, noting Mr Piccard employs self-hypnosis strategies while Mr Borschberg turns to yoga.

Meanwhile, both can nap in up to 20-minute spurts 10-12 times a day when crossing the blue parts of the map thanks to a modified autopilot, she added.

Long stretches over the world's largest waters may prove particularly trying.

"Just imagine, in the 4-square-

World

WORLD EDITOR: Fiona MacGregor

DHAKA

Murder of high-profile blogger draws hundreds to street protests

HUNDREDS of protesters gathered in Dhaka on February 27 to denounce the murder of a prominent American blogger of Bangladeshi origin hacked to death with machetes after he allegedly received threats from Islamists.

The demonstrators - including teachers, publishers and fellow writers - met near the spot where Avijit Roy, founder of the Mukto-Mona (Free-mind) blog, was attacked by unknown assailants as he returned home from a book fair with his wife the previous evening.

They chanted slogans including "We want justice" and "raise your voice against militants".

No one has yet claimed responsibility for the vicious attack, which also seriously wounded the 44-year-old's wife and has shocked many in a country already reeling from weeks of violent political protest.

But the atheist writer's family said he had received numerous threats from Islamists before his death, and the rally was expected to draw hundreds of Bangladeshis concerned about the rise in Islamism in their country.

Mr Roy, a US citizen, is the second Bangladeshi atheist blogger to have been murdered in two years and the fourth writer to have been attacked since 2004.

"The attack on Roy and his wife Rafida Ahmed is outrageous," said Imran H Sarker, head of a Bangladeshi bloggers' association.

"We strongly protest this attack and are deeply concerned about the safety of writers."

Hardline Islamist groups have long demanded the public execution of atheist bloggers and sought new laws to combat writing critical of Islam.

Police have launched an investigation and recovered the machetes used in the attack, which they compared to that on atheist blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in 2013.

Mr Haider was hacked to death by

members of a little-known Islamist militant group, triggering nationwide protests by tens of thousands of secular activists.

"The pattern of the killing appeared to be the same that of previous attack on a celebrated writer," assistant commissioner of Dhaka police Shiblee Noman said.

"It seems it was carried out by reactionary fundamentalist group."

'Dr Roy was a true ally, a courageous and eloquent defender of reason, science, and free expression, in a country where those values have been under heavy attack.'

The Centre for Inquiry

Mr Noman also said police were investigating a tweet by the pro-Islamist group Ansar Bangla Seven that appeared to celebrate Roy's murder.

"Target Down here in #Bangladesh," the group tweeted from the @AnsarBn7 handle.

Roy's wife, who is also a blogger, was moved to a clinic for further treatment on Friday.

The writer's father Ajoy Roy said he had received a number of "threatening" emails and messages on social media from hardliners unhappy with his writing.

Mr Roy had written about 10 books, including the best-selling "Biswisher Virus" (Virus of Faith), as

well as his blog, which championed liberal secular writing in the Muslim-majority nation.

The Center for Inquiry, a US-based charity promoting free thought, said it was "shocked and heartbroken" by the brutal murder of Mr Roy.

"Dr Roy was a true ally, a courageous and eloquent defender of reason, science, and free expression, in a country where those values have been under heavy attack," it said in a statement.

Mr Roy's killing also triggered strong condemnation from his fellow writers and publishers, who lamented the growing religious conservatism and intolerance in Bangladesh.

Pinaki Bhattacharya, a fellow blogger and friend of Mr Roy, said one of the country's largest online book retailers was being openly threatened for selling Mr Roy's books.

"In Bangladesh the easiest target is an atheist. An atheist can be attacked and murdered," he wrote on Facebook.

After Mr Haider's death, Bangladesh's hardline Islamist groups started to protest against other campaigning bloggers, accusing them of blasphemy and calling a series of nationwide strikes to demand their execution.

The secular government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reacted by arresting some atheist bloggers.

The government also blocked about a dozen websites and blogs to stem the furor over blasphemy, as well as stepping up security for the bloggers.

Bangladesh is the world's fourth-largest Muslim majority nation with Muslims making up some 90 per cent of the country's 160 million people.

A tribunal has recently handed down a series of verdicts against leading Islamists and others for crimes committed during the war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. - AFP



LONDON

Families call for 'Jihadi John' name

"JIHADI John", the masked Islamic State group militant believed responsible for the beheading of at least five Western hostages, has been named as Kuwaiti-born computing graduate Mohammed Emwazi from London.

Nicknamed after Beatle John Lennon due to his British accent, he is believed to be responsible for the murders of US journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff, British aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning, and American aid worker Abdul-Rahman Kassig.

He also appeared in a video with Japanese hostages Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto shortly before they were killed.

Families of the murdered hostages said they looked forward to seeing Mr Emwazi brought to justice.

In the videos posted online, he appears dressed all in black with only his eyes exposed, brandishing a knife while launching tirades against the West.

A *Washington Post* report citing friends, a leading think tank researching foreign jihadists and a British security official quoted by the *New York Times* identified Mr Emwazi as the executioner.

However London's Metropolitan Police dismissed the reports as "speculation" and said it was "not going to confirm his identity" to

protect human lives while the US National Security Council said it would neither confirm nor deny the reports.

The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King's College in London said it believed the identity "to be accurate and correct".

"We're pretty confident that the right individual has been named," Shiraz Maher, a senior research fellow at the centre, said.

He believed the leak had come from the United States and pointed out that "there are no further Americans being held hostage by Islamic State".

"I think the US chose to put this out," he said.

The family of Mr Sotloff, an American-Israeli journalist murdered by the Islamic State group, said they hoped establishing the identity of the killer would bring him closer to facing justice.

"The Sotloff family was informed of John's identity. This is one step on a long road to bringing him to justice," said Barak Barfi, the Sotloff family's spokesperson, in a statement.

"If indeed Mohammed Emwazi is the man who executed Steve, the Sotloffs have full faith that the American intelligence community and law enforcement agencies will



The body of Avijit Roy, a US blogger of Bangladeshi origin, lies on a trolley at Dhaka Medical College hospital morgue in Dhaka. Photo: AFP



A year on from annex, effects of isolation hit daily life in Crimea

WORLD 40

Untouchable labourers in Nepal still in slavery

WORLD 41



Amnesty slams 'ineffective' UN Security Council

WORLD 44



IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

Markus Kemeter shows his bionic hand on February 24 in Vienna. He was one of three Austrian men to undergo a new medical technique, "bionic reconstruction", developed by Oskar Aszmann, head of plastic surgery at the Medical University of Vienna, in a world-first use of mind-controlled bionic hand, according to a research published in *The Lancet* on February 25.

justice as IS executioner med as London graduate

apprehend him.

"They look forward to the day that John will be prosecuted and convicted for the crime of executing Steve."

The daughter of aid worker Mr Haines told ITV News that her family would "feel closure and relief once there's a bullet between his eyes".

Cage, a civil rights group that was in contact with Mr Emwazi for several years over his alleged harassment by British security services, said that while not 100 percent certain, it believed it was him.

Cage's research director Asim Qureishi described Mr Emwazi as a "beautiful young man" who had been alienated by his treatment at the hands of the British security services.

Cage published correspondence with Mr Emwazi in which he alleged that a British MI5 secret service agent named "Nick" tried to recruit him while interrogating him at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport in 2009.

Mr Emwazi said he was returning with two friends after they were expelled from Tanzania, accused of trying to join Islamist militants in Somalia but on a trip that he said was a safari holiday after finishing university.

"Why don't you work for us?" Mr Emwazi quoted "Nick" as telling him. After refusing, he said the

officer told him, "You're going to have a lot of trouble, you're going to be known, you're going to be followed."

After being refused entry to Kuwait three times, Mr Emwazi left his London home in 2013 and four

'The Sotloff family was informed of John's identity. This is one step ... to bringing him closer to justice.'

Barak Barfi

Spokesperson for the family of murdered journalist Steven Sotloff

months later police told his family he had entered Syria, according to Cage.

The emails appear to point to growing radicalisation. He finished one in 2010 saying, "May Allah get rid of the oppressors i.e. security agents".

Mr Emwazi, said by Cage to be 26, was identified to the *Washington*

Post by friends and others familiar with the case, with one acquaintance telling the paper, "I have no doubt that Mohammed is Jihadi John."

Mr Emwazi is from a middle-class family and earned a degree in computer programming. He is described as being quiet and polite with stylish dress sense. In one email to Cage, he complained about police going through his designer clothes.

Dozens of reporters gathered outside a modern property believed to belong to his family in the north-west London neighbourhood of Queen's Park.

Mr Qureishi, Cage's research director, said the family did not believe the allegations against their son and were in a state of "absolute shock".

The University of Westminster said in a statement that it had a record of a Mohammed Emwazi leaving college six years ago and was setting up a pastoral team to provide advice and support to students.

Mr Maher, the research fellow from King's College, London predicted that Mr Emwazi's apparent unmasking would deal a "psychological blow" to the IS group.

"They'll feel somewhat deflated that someone they wanted to preserve and protect as an asset has been outed in this way but it won't change anything day to day." – AFP

WASHINGTON

US and Cuba seek breakthrough with historic talks

US and Cuban negotiators launched a second round of historic talks on February 27 aimed at overcoming half a century of enmity and restoring full diplomatic ties.

After an initial meeting in Havana in January which ended with little apparent breakthrough, the teams were to meet at the State Department – the hub of US global diplomacy.

The hope is that within the coming months both nations will agree to reopen embassies in each other's capitals and appoint fully-fledged ambassadors. Currently they operate with so-called interests sections in Havana and Washington.

US President Barack Obama is due to attend the Summit of the Americas in Panama on April 10-11, which Cuba will also attend for the first time.

And observers believe both nations, long mired in tension stemming from the Cold War, are keen to relaunch full diplomatic relations around that date.

But after more than five decades of hostility and suspicion, steep obstacles remain to renewing diplomatic ties.

This is seen as the first step toward a full normalisation of relations between the United States and the communist-run Caribbean island which has been governed for five decades by revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and his brother, the current President Raul Castro.

Ahead of the talks, both sides staked out their differences.

Cuban officials demanded that as a preliminary step Havana be stripped of its US designation as a state sponsor of terrorism – a label which has stalked the island since 1982, and which among other sanctions has complicated access to the global banking system.

Washington, however, has insisted that its ongoing review of the terror blacklisting should not be linked to the restoration of diplomatic ties.

In return, the US has insisted that its diplomats and embassy be granted full powers under the Vienna Convention governing global diplomatic relations to operate freely, including meeting with Cuban dissidents.

The US team will be led by the Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere, Roberta Jacobson, who last month became the highest-ranking US official to visit Cuba in 35 years.

She will be sitting across the table from Cuban negotiator Josefina Vidal.

"I certainly think that our

presidents and my secretary would be delighted if we could have everything worked out in time for the Summit of the Americas," a senior State Department official told reporters ahead of the February 27 talks.

"But that depends a lot on how our counterparts come to the table prepared to get things done and whether they are comfortable with the things we need in order to run an embassy the way we do in other places around the world."

The official added the talks could prove to be "little bit disappointingly workman-like in their nature this time. But this is where we roll up our sleeves as diplomats and sit down at the table and make sure that we hammer out all of the details out to get embassies up and running."

Restoring diplomatic ties "doesn't take very long if we get agreement on things", the official added.

Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister, Gustavo Machin, called for his country to be removed from the terror blacklist saying it would "be a contradiction" if Havana were to remain on the list while enjoying diplomatic ties with Washington.

But the State Department official said that while Washington was "moving forward on the review of Cuba on that list as quickly as we can ... we don't think that that should be linked to the restoration of diplomatic relations".

"It would be very easy to restore diplomatic relations if they would not link those two things," the official added.

Mr Obama, who in a surprise December agreement said he had agreed to seek normal ties, has called on the US Congress to lift the decades-old biting economic embargo of Cuba.

But some lawmakers, as well as parts of the Cuban dissident community, remain wary of the diplomatic demarche, arguing Mr Obama has failed to secure guarantees about progress on human rights.

One of the aims of the February 27 meeting was to set a date for the first ever US-Cuba discussion on human rights.

Although no date has been set "it will be the first time that we would be able to sit down with the government directly and have an in-depth conversation about our differing perspectives," the State Department official said. – AFP



A worker puts cigars in boxes at the H Upman Cigar Factory in Havana on February 26. Photo: AFP

SIMFEROPOL

A year after annex, effects of isolation felt in Crimea



People hold Crimean flags in Simferopol's Lenin Square on March 14, 2014, shortly after the region was annexed. Photo: AFP

CIRCLING her thumb and index finger to make a zero, Tatyana Chernetskaya indicates how many clients her Crimean firm has one year after Russia took over the peninsula: "None."

While many supporters of annexation of the Black Sea province from Ukraine expected to be better off under Moscow's rule, business in Crimea is strangled by economic isolation, Western sanctions and local authorities nationalising key Ukrainian firms.

Ms Chernetskaya's firm, which produces accounting software, has had to fire most of its 55 staff, leaving just five. They lost over 3000 clients in mainland Ukraine after telephone and banking communications were cut in the wake of Russia's annexation.

And the few local clients were pressured by the new Russian authorities to dump her software and switch to a Russian-made program.

In the company's office, Ukrainian certificates still hang on walls and boxes packed with obsolete paperwork await disposal by the front door.

She voted to join Russia in the referendum held in Crimea last March and has a portrait of Russian President Vladimir Putin hanging in her office.

Her "very typical" hardships are the fault of corrupt local officials and "senseless" Western sanctions, not the

Kremlin, she insists, even if she describes the transition to Russian tax and labour laws as overwhelming.

"It's as if I fled as a refugee to a new country and have to start my life from scratch," she said. "There is a feeling that you are in some sort of nowhere-land. You've been left behind in that previous life, while here you have nothing."

Many people on the peninsula who voted to join Russia last year were lured by the prospects of better economic opportunities.

But Ukraine has cut most transport and communications links, while Western sanctions ban investment and restrict work of US and European companies. Visa and Mastercard do not work and it is difficult to exchange currency.

All this scares even major Russian firms from operating in Crimea.

The resulting economy is cash-based, with erratic supplies from Russia's southern Krasnodar region, with which Crimea shares an unreliable ferry link over the Kerch Strait.

Shortages are manifest in thinly-stocked local supermarkets, where many shelves just have a single row of identical goods, reminiscent of the Soviet era.

The separation of Crimea from

Ukraine has dealt a devastating blow to the photogenic region's once-booming tourism industry, with tourist numbers dropping from 5.9 million in 2013 to 3.8 million in 2014, despite Russia's efforts to subsidise package tours.

Ukrainians, who previously made up over 65 percent of tourists, did not come to Crimea's beaches last summer, said Yelena Attestatova, who runs a travel agency.

'When we voted for returning Crimea to Russia ... we could not imagine such consequences in our worst nightmares'

Wine producer Missandra to Vladimir Putin

International cruise ships also stayed away, leaving Russians as about the only customers.

"We are waiting for things to nor-

malise," Ms Attestatova said. "What else is there to do?"

Western sanctions have led to the closure of McDonald's fast-food outlets and Shell gas stations, and pushed workers dependent on global companies to relocate.

"I couldn't figure out why I must suffer and look for ways to circumvent [the sanctions] if I can easily work somewhere else," said Pavel Berman, a Russian who came to Crimea last spring to develop an IT business but who became disillusioned and recently went back home to Saint Petersburg.

"Nobody expected this isolation," he said, complaining that eBay, PayPal, Google and Apple are blocked in Crimea.

"You can get around these bans through VPNs, but each time it takes more time," he said.

Aside from the struggles of small business, large Ukrainian-owned companies have undergone so-called "nationalisation" after being raided by local paramilitary units, most recently telephone and power providers Ukrtelekom and Krymenergo.

Last month the armed men - who last year helped take over government buildings and army bases and were never disbanded - came to Massandra, the iconic Crimean wine producer which

has operated since the tsarist era and was last year put under control of the Kremlin's property management office.

In a letter to Mr Putin this month, the company said its operations and staff of 2500 are at risk due to "utter incompetency and unquenchable profiteering" of the new owners and the Crimean authorities, who are pressuring the company to cede valuable coastal land where its vineyards are located.

"When we voted for returning Crimea to Russia ... we could not have imagined such consequences in our worst nightmares," said the letter, posted on Ukrainian websites.

Massandra director Nikolai Boiko said the ordeals have caused him so much stress that he is in hospital with heart problems.

Meanwhile Ms Chernetskaya, the owner of the software firm, said she has taken up painting as a new source of income and is thinking of emigrating to Poland since one of her grandfathers executed under Stalin had Polish roots.

Her portrait of Mr Putin gazes over application forms and Polish language-teaching CDs strewn on her desk.

"My business is dying," she said. "It's not Putin's fault. It's just ... life." - AFP

HONG KONG

Six-year jail term for HK woman who abused maid

A WOMAN was jailed for six years on February 27 for beating and starving her Indonesian maid and keeping her prisoner, in a case that raised international concern over the treatment of domestic staff in Hong Kong.

Law Wan-tung - who had faced a maximum sentence of seven years - "showed no compassion" to Erwiana Sulistyarningsih and other domestic staff, said judge Amanda Woodcock in handing down the sentence.

Ms Law saw her staff as "people that are beneath her" said Ms Woodcock.

Of Ms Sulistyarningsih's treatment she added, "She was given little rest, sleep and nutrition which left her a shadow of her former self."

Ms Woodcock called for an investigation by Hong Kong and Indonesian authorities into the workers' conditions.

Ms Sulistyarningsih, 24, told a Hong

Kong court in December how she lived on nothing but meagre rations of bread and rice, slept only four hours a day and was beaten so badly by her employer Ms Law that she was knocked unconscious.

During the six-week trial, prosecutors said mother-of-two Law, 44, turned household items such as a mop, a ruler and a clothes hanger into "weapons" against her maids.

Ms Law was convicted on 18 of 20 charges laid against her, including grievous bodily harm, assault, criminal intimidation and failure to pay wages.

"It is regrettable that this conduct is not rare and sadly is often dealt with in the criminal courts," said Ms Woodcock.

"Such conduct could be prevented if domestic helpers were not forced to live in their employer's home," which is stipulated under Hong Kong law and is a key point which campaigners want

reformed.

Ms Woodcock also highlighted the "significant fees" charged to domestic helpers by agencies in their home countries and deducted from their Hong Kong salaries.

"There must be an element of exploitation here ... The domestic helper becomes trapped when they are unhappy, but cannot leave or change employers because the debt needs to be paid off," she said.

Wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with her own face and the word "justice" Ms Sulistyarningsih remained expressionless as the sentence was read out - she had said that she hoped Ms Law would receive the maximum term.

Earlier Ms Law's defence lawyer Graham Harris had said she was "not a monster" in mitigation and referred to her charity work and role as a mother. - AFP



Supporters of former Indonesian domestic helper Erwiana Sulistyarningsih, 24, hold banners in front of the District Court before the sentencing of her former employer Law Wan-tung, 44, in Hong Kong on February 27. Photo: AFP

GUIUAN, PHILIPPINES

Hollande visits typhoon-hit town

FRENCH President Francois Hollande last week visited a remote Philippine town devastated by one of the world's strongest typhoons, seeking to sound a global alarm on climate change ahead of a crucial UN summit.

Mr Hollande was on a two-day trip to the Southeast Asian archipelago, regarded as a frontline state in the struggle against global warming, as part of his campaign to build diplomatic momentum ahead of the Paris summit in December.

On February 26, he launched an appeal with Philippine President Benigno Aquino in Manila for world leaders meeting in Paris to secure a "universal, equitable and ambitious climate deal" that would avert catastrophic global warming.

Their appeal offered a show of unity they said could serve as a model for rich and poor nations, whose divisions led to a similar effort at a UN summit in Copenhagen in 2009 ending in disarray.

"We have a duty to act together and that's why I came here to the Philippines, to launch an appeal, to seal an alliance," Mr Hollande said.

On February 27 Mr Hollande flew to Guiuan, a small coastal town in the far eastern Philippines of about 50,000 people that is still trying to recover from Super Typhoon Haiyan 15 months ago.

Guiuan was among the first towns hit when Super Typhoon Haiyan roared in off the Pacific Ocean with winds of 315 kilometres (195 miles) an hour, the strongest gales ever recorded on land.

Haiyan then swept across already deeply impoverished farming and fishing communities of the central Philippines, claiming more than 7350 lives.

Rebuilding those communities is expected to take many years and cost billions of dollars. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of survivors will continue to live in danger zones along the coast. - AFP

THEHE, NEPAL

'Untouchables' still in slavery

WHEN Nepal's Maoist-led government outlawed bonded labour in 2008 and promised to compensate victims, farmworker Hiralal Pariyar was elated to walk away from a life spent in virtual slavery.

But the compensation never came, leaving a homeless and penniless Pariyar little choice but to return to his old landlord.

"Nothing has changed in six years. From the day I was born until now, the landlord has owned my life," the 38-year-old explained.

More than six years after it was outlawed, bonded labour remains rife in Nepal, where landless farmworkers known as *haliyas* (ploughmen) are born into slavery and passed on from one generation of landlords to the next.

Many hoped for change when a newly-elected government led by former Maoist rebels freed them from bondage in September 2008, months after Nepal cast off a 240-year-old monarchy and became a republic.

The Maoists had promised to end centuries of inequality and write a constitution that would transform a country where one out of four people survives on less than US\$1.25 a day. But lawmakers have spent years squabbling over the charter, frustrating millions of Nepalis including *haliyas*.

Successive administrations have pledged reparations for the *haliyas*, but no one has received any financial compensation and a long-promised programme of land ownership reform has yet to materialise.

This has meant their lives have remained much as they were before being "freed" - they are still reliant on landlords.

Mr Pariyar's calloused hands and chronic shoulder pain testify to a life spent pulling the plough. A sixth-generation bonded labourer, he started working when he was just 13, clocking 15-hour days in exchange for room and board.

"We are like the landlord's inherited property - my grandfather worked for them, then my father, now me," he said.



Nani Biswokarma (left) works on land owned by her landlord in Baraunsi village in Humla district, some 430 kilometres (267 miles) north-west of Kathmandu on November 8, 2014. Photo: AFP

In all those years, little has changed in his village, Thehe, perched on a ridge in the Himalayas and home to segregated *haliya* settlements with no electricity or running water.

Like Mr Pariyar, most *haliyas* belong to the impoverished Dalit or "untouchable" Hindu community and

'I can no longer imagine a day when I will be out of this prison.'

Hiralal Pariyar
Haliya worker

are forbidden to work indoors, enter temples or even take water from taps used by upper-caste villagers and their animals.

Although the ties connecting landlord and labourer are binding, they are rarely intimate.

"They see us as untouchables. They don't interact with us. They only care if we come to work or not," said Nani Biswokarma, 23, a *haliya* working in Baraunsi village in Nepal's remote northwest.

The mother of two says she worried "all the time" about her children's future.

"We have no money, no house, no land, nothing - we can't afford to educate them. I want them to have better lives but I can't see how it will happen," she said.

Parbat Sunar was one of a handful of *haliya* children able to attend school thanks to a bargain his family struck with their landlord.

Even the classroom was not free from discrimination - he and other low-caste children were told to sit on the floor, not on school benches.

"I felt very hurt and wondered why we were always on the floor. I used to feel tormented by it," said Mr Sunar, who now heads a non-profit group fighting for *haliya* rights.

Laxman Kumar Hamal, a government official responsible for *haliya* resettlement, blamed a lack of money

for the delay. "I know it's taken years, we are trying to resettle them but we have budget constraints and cannot purchase land for all of them in one go," Mr Hamal said.

"We hope to resettle more *haliyas* in the months to come," he added.

Although the 2006 peace deal between the Maoists and the state underscored the need for a "scientific land reform program ... ending [the] feudalistic system of landholding", no political party has asked landlords to hand over land to *haliyas*.


Mr Sunar says just 80 of the 19,000 *haliya* families identified by the government had received land.

"We had high expectations from lawmakers after their claims of building a new Nepal, but they have done nothing," he said.


As Mr Pariyar dragged a plough across his landlord's hilly plot on a wintry morning, he said nothing would make him happier than to see the practice end.

"But I can no longer imagine a day when I will be out of this prison. I don't even dream of it any more."

- AFP




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IN PICTURES

Photo: AFP

Bangladesh residents react after finding the body of a relative following a ferry accident at Paturia some 70 kilometres (43 miles) east of Dhaka on February 23. The death toll rose to at least 78 last week, after more bodies were recovered from the overcrowded boat which sank within minutes of colliding with a cargo vessel.

BANGKOK

Prayut to testify on deadly 2010 protests

THAILAND'S junta chief has said he is willing to provide testimony about his involvement in a deadly 2010 military crackdown on anti-government protesters in Bangkok that left more than 90 dead.

Prayut Chan-O-Cha, an army leader who seized power last May, is often described as the architect of the crackdown which ended months of street protests by "Red Shirt" supporters loyal to ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, one of the bloodiest chapters in Thailand's recent turbulent history.

Last week the kingdom's anti-graft agency recommended that the two civilian leaders in charge at the time - former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and his deputy Suthep Thaugsuban - should face an abuse of power investigation for ordering the crackdown.

Speaking to reporters on February 26, Mr Prayut said he was willing to submit evidence to the body investigat-

ing Mr Abhisit and Mr Suthep.

But he played down the prospect of appearing at an NACC hearing in person.

"I am ready to give information, although some information can be given in the form of documents without me attending," Mr Prayut said.

"Please don't see this as a big issue," he added.

The junta chief then batted away a question over whether the

probe against Mr Abhisit and Mr Suthep, both staunch supporters of Thailand's military establishment, might cause "trouble" for the army, gruffly replying, "What trouble?"

Mr Prayut has always denied any wrongdoing over the 2010 violence, saying troops were forced to confront armed protesters, many of whom were dressed in black, after months of demonstrations that had paralysed downtown Bangkok.

But the prospect of the current prime minister - as well as the former top army officer - appearing in court is likely to revive awkward questions over the role of the military in the bloody episode, which also left parts of commercial Bangkok ablaze.

While some among the Red Shirt demonstrators carried weapons, many academics and human rights investigators say scores of unarmed protesters and bystanders were cut down by soldiers' bullets, including medics and two foreign journalists.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission last week concluded that innocent people were among those killed.

Campaigners accuse rifle-toting soldiers of opening fire from the elevated train tracks that run through downtown Bangkok.

No soldier or military official has been convicted or punished over the crackdown.

The kingdom has been battered by a decade-long political crisis that broadly pits Bangkok's middle class and royalist elites, backed by parts of the military, against rural and working-class voters loyal to Mr Thaksin and his sister Ms Yingluck, who was toppled as premier by Mr Prayut in May.

The country's interventionist military has staged 19 successful or attempted coups since 1932.

Mr Prayut's coup has seen martial law imposed across Thailand with the media muzzled, criticism of the junta forbidden and political gatherings of more than five people banned.

In an indication some restrictions could remain long after martial law is lifted, the country's junta-appointed parliament on February 26 - unanimously passed a bill restricting public protest during its first reading.

"The main details are that people have to ask permission before gathering," Wallop Tungkananurak, a member of the National Legislative Assembly, said.

The law would also keep any protest at least 150 metres (500 feet) away from key government buildings, Mr Wallop added.

Massive street protests have scorched Thailand's political landscape since Mr Thaksin's overthrow in 2006, with state offices frequently besieged or occupied by rival political camps. - AFP

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LONDON

UN powers should lose genocide veto; Amnesty

WORLD leaders have proved "shameful and ineffective" in failing to protect civilians from groups like Islamic State (IS), Amnesty International said last week, calling 2014 a "catastrophic" year.

In its 415-page annual report detailing abuses in 160 countries, the group accused governments of "pretending the protection of civilians is beyond their power".

The report singled out the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for criticism, with Amnesty's secretary general Shail Shetty saying it had "miserably failed" to protect civilians.

The five permanent UNSC members - Britain, China, France, Russia and the US - "consistently abused" their veto right to "promote their political self-interest or geopolitical interest above the interest of protecting civilians", he added.

The report said millions of civilians had been affected by conflict from Syria to Ukraine, Gaza to Nigeria. The number of displaced people around the world exceeded 50 million last year for the first time since the end of World War II.

"2014 was a catastrophic year for millions caught up in violence," said Mr Shetty.

"The global response to conflict and abuses by states and armed groups has been shameful and ineffective. As people suffered an escalation in barbarous attacks and repression, the international community has been found wanting."

It warned that the situation would get worse this year unless leaders took immediate action. Amnesty is now urging the five states to give up their right to veto action in cases where genocide and other mass killings are being committed.



Amnesty International France President Genevieve Garrigos presents on February 24 the 2014-2015 report during a press conference in Paris. Photo: AFP

This proposal is similar to a push being led by France with the backing of 70 countries, but Amnesty hopes its support will give the idea fresh impetus. It believes the move would give the UN a better chance to save civilian lives in conflict zones.

Amnesty also urged all states to abide by a treaty regulating the international arms trade which came into force last year, saying this could help stop huge shipments of weapons to countries like Syria and Iraq.

In addition, it called for new restrictions on the use of explosive weapons like mortars and rockets in populated areas.

The human rights group, which says it has 7 million campaigners worldwide, sharply criticised the European Union's response to the 4 million Syrian refugees displaced by conflict in the world's worst refugee crisis.

By the end of 2014, only 150,000

Syrian refugees were living in EU states, it said, while 3400 refugees and migrants had died in the Mediterranean Sea trying to make their way to Europe.

"The response of the EU and its member states was, with few exceptions, driven above all by the desire to keep them out," the report said.

Mr Shetty added that the European response to the problem was "actually pushing people into the water of the Mediterranean".

The report said only 2 percent of refugees from Syria had been resettled by the end of last year, and called for this figure to at least triple this year.

Overall, armed groups like IS, Boko Haram and Shebab were found to have committed abuses in 35 countries last year, Amnesty said - over one in five of those investigated for the report.

- AFP



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Dated: 2 March 2015

BEIJING**China bans carved ivory imports for one year**

BEIJING has imposed a one-year ban on imports of ivory carvings, but questions remained on its effect on rising Chinese demand, which critics say could push wild African elephants to extinction within a generation.

The move on February 26 came days ahead of a visit to China by Britain's Prince William, who has campaigned against illegal wildlife trafficking and is expected to speak on the issue during a stop in the southwestern province of Yunnan on March 4.

The measure was announced by China's State Forestry Administration in a statement posted on its website.

China is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), but conservationists say it is the world's largest consumer of illegal ivory, with skyrocketing demand leading to the slaughter of tens of thousands of African elephants each year.

But the Chinese move may prove largely symbolic as most illegal ivory is smuggled raw, and there is a significant ivory processing industry inside the country.

Regulated sales of ivory carvings are legal in China, which has a long tradition of such decoration, and items are popular with Chinese collectors who see them as a valuable investment.

The raw material is often intricately carved to depict anything from devotional Buddhist scenes to wildlife and bizarre fantasies. It is also turned into the seals or "chops" used to sign documents, and more mundane household objects such as chopsticks.

Under CITES, almost all international commerce in ivory is banned, although some limited categories such as licensed hunting trophies are legal and there have been occasional approved "one-off" sales of stockpiles by African countries.

Campaigners condemn such

'Every metric on the ivory trade has exploded upwards in recent years.'

Report by Save the Elephants and The Aspinall Foundation



An ivory folding fan is displayed in a crafts shop in Hangzhou, in east China's Zhejiang province, on February 27. Photo: AFP

disposals as actually providing cover to the illegal trade.

The one-year timeframe for the ban on carving imports "is designed to assess the effects", Xinhua reported, but it was not clear what, if any, impact it would have.

An official at the State Forestry Administration said that China's last major legal ivory acquisition was in 2008, when 62 tonnes were purchased at a one-off auction, and since then "there have not been significant imports".

Globally, the vast majority of illegal ivory seizures by weight are of the raw material, according to CITES' Elephant Trade Information System database, documents on the CITES website show - more than 90 percent in 2011.

Chinese forestry ministry official Yan Xun said in May 2013 that the country had 37 legal ivory processing firms and 145 sales companies according to Chinese media reports.

Between 800 to 900 smuggling cases are detected in China every year, according to customs statistics cited by the state-run *Beijing Youth Daily*, which said more than half of businesses dealing in legal ivory are also involved in illegal trade.

China has come under increasing international pressure on the issue in recent months.

Last year, Prince William appeared in an advert against the illegal wildlife trade along with footballer David Beckham and Chinese basketball superstar Yao Ming, who said, "I want our

children to be able to see elephants in the wild."

A joint report in December from Save the Elephants and The Aspinall Foundation campaign groups found that more than 100,000 wild elephants were killed from 2010 to 2012, with their slaughter largely fuelled by the "out of control" illegal ivory trade in China.

China is making efforts to stem the trade, the report's authors said, including closing down at least 10 officially designated factories and jailing hundreds of dealers, but the measures were not going far enough.

Researchers said prices for raw ivory in China had risen from US\$750 per kilogram in 2010 to \$2100 in 2014.

"Every metric on the ivory trade has exploded upward in recent years," they said.

But Chinese officials have denied that demand in the country is rising.

Meng Xianlin, executive director-general of the Endangered Species Import and Export Management Office of China, told the state-run *China Daily* newspaper that "the scale of illegal ivory production is way smaller than legal production".

The number of wildlife smuggling cases in China dropped 70 percent last year from 2013, the paper reported. Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said on February 26 that bringing an end to poaching and the illegal ivory trade "requires joint efforts from all parties".

- AFP

WASHINGTON**N Korea could have 100 nuclear arms within 5 years, report warns**

NORTH Korea appears poised to expand its nuclear program over the next five years and in a worst-case scenario could possess 100 atomic arms by 2020, US researchers have warned.

Cutting-edge European companies could be unwittingly contributing to Pyongyang's suspect nuclear program with their equipment diverted to the isolated country via China, they said.

Unveiling the first results of what will be a 15-month study, Joel Wit, senior fellow at the US-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University, said last week that some of their conclusions were very "disturbing".

Although North Korea's nuclear program remains shrouded in uncertainty, Pyongyang is currently believed to have a stockpile of some 10 to 16 nuclear weapons fashioned from either plutonium or weapons-grade uranium.

Using satellite imagery, North

Korean media reports and their deep knowledge of nuclear programs, Mr Wit and renowned non-proliferation expert David Albright have drawn up three possible future scenarios based on the progress made by Pyongyang from 2009 to 2014.

Those years, which followed the 2008 collapse of international six-party nuclear talks, were "banner years" for Pyongyang's nuclear program and missile systems development, Mr Wit said.

"For these kinds of programs there have been developments that make it at least more possible to predict the future," Mr Wit told reporters. "We're making our best guess about the future ... We're estimating the future, just like intelligence agencies do."

In the first scenario, Pyongyang would almost double its stockpile to about 20 weapons, including plutonium-based weapons which have been

miniaturised sufficiently to be mounted on its Rodong-class medium-range ballistic missile, capable of reaching Japan.

In the second, most likely scenario, North Korea continues its current trajectory and manages to produce 50 weapons by 2020.

It would also make significant advances in miniaturisation technology, enabling it to mount warheads on a new generation of intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

In what Mr Wit dubbed "the worst case scenario", the North Korean stockpile would grow more rapidly to 100 weapons and make "significant advances" in weapons designs to enable it to potentially deploy battlefield and tactical weapons.

"This is a pretty scary scenario, where we are seeing a dramatic expansion in North Korea's stockpile," Mr Wit said. - AFP

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*Shame.
Stigma.
Discrimination.
Unemployment.
Welcome to the world of
the HIV positive.*



Photo: Kaung Htet

Suffering in silence



NYEIN EI EI HTWE

nyeineiehtwe23@gmail.com

THE sign at the entrance to the restaurant reads, "Customers can eat here safely. We do not employ HIV-positive staff." It is not the only business that refuses jobs to HIV-infected people, since deliberate workplace discrimination based on a worker's HIV-positive status is a common practice in Myanmar.

Ma Pa Pa, 35, is HIV-positive. She used to work at a jewellery shop, but when her husband died of AIDS, the shop owner forced her to be tested for the disease. "When I tested positive, they gave me one month's salary and kicked me out," she said. "The owner also threatened to tell other shops that I was HIV-positive if I tried to find a new job," she added.

"It was a very difficult time for me. I had no income to pay for my treatment or my daughter's school fees, and I had little chance of finding a new job."

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), an estimated 35 million people globally were living with HIV in 2013, and 2.1 million people became newly infected with the virus. In the same year, an estimated 1.5 million died of AIDS-related illnesses.

UNAIDS estimates that there were 190,000 people living with HIV in Myanmar in 2013, with about 6400 becoming newly infected. Infection is especially prevalent among injecting drug-users (18.7 percent), MSM and trans-genders (10.4pc), and sex-workers (8.1pc).

Discrimination against people living with HIV in Myanmar is due to basic misinformation about the virus and how it is transmitted, says Ma Pa Pa, who is now working at a local NGO as a peer to provide healthcare to other HIV-positive people.

Commonly held beliefs about HIV-positive people are that infection is the result of personal irresponsibility or moral fault, such as infidelity, or that it can be easily transmitted via contact with infected people. In the workplace, people living with HIV may suffer stigma from their co-workers and employers or experience discriminatory practices, such as termination or refusal of employment.

"People who are living with HIV have to take a lot of time off work to go to the clinic for treatment, so it's not easy to find a company that will employ us," said Ma Pa Pa.

She believes the government should do more to provide job opportunities for people living with HIV because of the discrimination they face when looking for work.

Daw Mya Mya works in a photography studio in downtown Yangon. She doesn't tell anyone that she is HIV-positive. "I was infected by my husband, who passed away five years ago. Only my son knows," she said.

She goes to a free NGO clinic in Pazundaung township for her treatment, and lives in fear that she will run into someone she knows through work.

"I take special care not to do anything at work that might make me bleed. Whenever I'm told to do something using a knife, I ask someone else to do it," said Daw Mya Mya, who says she feels guilty about lying to people, but knows that she will not find another job if she tells her employer she is infected.

"I know I shouldn't lie, but I don't accept the discrimination HIV-positive people have to face, and I can't afford to lose my job. So I decided to keep my mouth shut. But the fear of being found out keeps me awake at night," she said in tears.

After she graduated, Ma Htwe Htwe Myint bought a small fabric shop in the city. But her life turned upside down in 2003 when she discovered she was HIV-positive.

"My family sent me away to a village because they were worried I would infect them if I lived in the same house. None of my relatives visited me in the village because they were afraid," she said.

A year later, she moved back to Yangon to undergo anti-retroviral therapy. Since she started receiving treatment her condition has improved, but her family still refuse to speak to her and her father has warned her not to go near them.

"I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't have sex with a lot of men. I fell in love with one man and married him, but everyone treats me like I have a lack of morality," she said.

Ma Htwe Htwe Myint did not have enough money to reopen her fabric shop, so she opened a small snack shop near a school in her local area.

"Parents wouldn't allow their children to buy snacks from my shop because they were afraid they would get infected with HIV, so I had to close," she said.

Depressed and lonely, Ma Htwe Htwe Myint moved to Hlaing Tharyar township to look for work with a local HIV NGO.

"I thought if I stayed with other infected people, they would understand me better," she said. She started working as a cleaner at the NGO, but when staff learned she had a degree they were quick to offer her a new role.

"They found out that I was skilled in maths and English and asked me to do their accounting, which I was happy to do," she said.

Now, Ma Htwe Htwe Myint is the secretary of the Myanmar Positive Women Network (MPWN) and campaigns for better healthcare and support for small businesses on behalf of women with HIV.

"Being able to start our own businesses is important. If we try to find work with other people we face discrimination. No one wants to work with us. Besides, we have to take a lot of medical leave, and we can't do any jobs that might cause us to bleed, so we require a lot of patience and understanding from our employers," she said.

Dr Kyaw Hlaing, a community mobilisation and networking adviser for UNAIDS, said many HIV-positive people suffered from self-stigma, in effect discriminating against themselves, as well as fearing discrimination from others.

"They face discrimination because people lack knowledge of HIV, so finally they are even afraid to get tested," he said.

In 2013, UNAIDS launched the "#zerodiscrimination" campaign with support from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, UNAIDS Global Advocate for Zero Discrimination, and last year it designated March 1 as annual Zero Discrimination Day.

"Last year, our theme was 'Join the transformation', which aimed to encourage everyone to help transform stereotypes about HIV-positive people," said Dr Kyaw Hlaing. "This year's theme is 'Open Up, Reach Out' to people with HIV," said Dr Kyaw Hlaing.

UNAIDS plans to conduct research into discrimination against people living with AIDS and HIV-positive people in Myanmar. It is hoped that the results will be out later this year.

Some names have been changed to protect identities.

'Birdman' soars to Oscars glory

MICHAEL THURSTON

BIRDMAN - a showbiz satire about the dark side of fame - soared to Oscars glory on February 22, taking four Academy Awards including the coveted best picture prize on Hollywood's biggest night.

Emotions ran high at the Dolby Theatre on an evening marked by political statements about women's rights, racial equality and the lives of Mexican migrants.

And there was disappointment for the team behind coming-of-age drama *Boyhood*, a longtime best picture favourite that lost steam as Tinseltown's awards season came to a close, with just one prize for best supporting actress, Patricia Arquette, out of six nominations.

Birdman, the fanciful yet dark story of a washed-up superhero film actor battling to revive his career on Broadway, was a grand triumph for Mexican director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, who personally won three of the film's four golden statuettes.

"Fear is the condom of life. It doesn't allow you to enjoy things," Inarritu said of the creative process behind his film, which won plaudits for its long, complex, unbroken shots - looking like one continuous take.

"So I took the condom off and it felt real"

Stylist crime caper *The Grand Budapest Hotel* also won four Oscars, but several of them came in technical categories, while jazz drumming drama *Whiplash* scored three, including best supporting actor for veteran actor J K Simmons.

Veteran Julianne Moore took

best actress as a professor suffering from early onset Alzheimer's disease in *Still Alice*, while best actor went to Britain's Eddie Redmayne as astrophysicist Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of Everything*. Redmayne, 33, dedicated his Oscar to people like Hawking suffering from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) and thanked the academic's family. Hawking later congratulated Redmayne in a Facebook post.

'Tonight, we honour Hollywood's best and whitest ... sorry, brightest'

Neil Patrick Harris

"Well done Eddie, I'm very proud of you," the wheelchair-bound academic said.

Inarritu, the second Mexican in a row to take the best director Oscar after Alfonso Cuaron won last year for *Gravity*, dedicated his award to his fellow countrymen.

Talking about Mexican immigrants living in the United States, he said, "I

just pray that they can be treated with the same dignity and respect as the ones who came before and built this incredible immigrant nation."

Disney's *Big Hero 6* was named best animated feature, while Poland's *Ida* took the best foreign language film prize.

Host Neil Patrick Harris launched the three-and-a-half-hour show with a song and dance routine about the movie industry itself - including a joke about the lack of any non-white actors in the four acting categories.

"Tonight, we honour Hollywood's best and whitest ... sorry, brightest," he said, earning laughs from the star-studded audience.

Arquette hit a political note in accepting her prize, giving a shoutout to "every woman who gave birth to every taxpayer and citizen of this nation."

"We have fought for everybody's equal rights," she said. "It is our time to have wage equality once and for all and equal rights for women in the United States of America."

The biggest standing ovation of the night honoured *Selma*, about civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.

The film, while nominated for best picture, controversially failed to secure nods for British actor David Oyelowo and director Ava DuVernay.

In the end, it won for best original song for the rousing "Glory" - and the A-list audience rose to their feet after John Legend and Common performed the song.

Oyelowo was seen with tears pouring down his face.

"We live in the most incarcerated country in the world," Legend said as he accepted his Oscar.

"There are more black men under correctional control today than there were under slavery in 1850."

There was also a political edge to the best documentary Oscar winner: *Citizenfour*, about the leaking of classified US government documents by former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden.

Snowden, who lives in exile in Russia, hailed the film's triumph.

"My hope is that this award will



Director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu poses with his Oscars for Best Original Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Motion Picture for 'Birdman' at the 87th Annual Academy Awards on February 22 in Hollywood, California. Photo: AFP/ Jason Merritt

encourage more people to see the film and be inspired by its message that ordinary citizens, working together, can change the world," he said.

Among the funniest moments of the night was when Harris appeared on stage in only his underwear, at the end of a backstage skit mimicking a scene from *Birdman*.

John Travolta also got his comeuppance for flubbing singer Idina Menzel's name at last year's show as he introduced her to sing "Let It Go," the Oscar-winning song from *Frozen*.

Harris took a dig at Travolta, joking that Benedict Cumberbatch is how the *Pulp Fiction* star would pronounce Ben Affleck. Menzel then introduced him as "Glom Gazingo."

"I deserve that," Travolta said.

Lady Gaga brought the house down with a soaring medley of songs

from the classic *The Sound of Music* to mark its 50th anniversary - before welcoming actress Julie Andrews onto the stage.

An In Memoriam section paid tribute to stars and filmmakers who died in 2014, including Robin Williams, Lauren Bacall and Mike Nichols. But eyebrows were raised about the absence of Joan Rivers, as well as Italian director Francesco Rosi.

Harris faced a tough act to follow after talk show hostess Ellen DeGeneres' turn last year, which included the celebrity selfie retweeted millions of times.

But initial reactions of his performance were positive.

"First impressions suggest Harris is the right guy for what can admittedly be a rather thankless job," said Variety television critic Brian Lowry. - AFP



Actress Julianne Moore accepts her Oscar for Best Actress for *Still Alice* during the 87th Oscars on February 22 in Hollywood, California. Photo: AFP/Frederic J Brown



Winner for Best Actor Eddie Redmayne accepts his award from Cate Blanchett on stage at the 87th Oscars on February 22 in Hollywood, California. Photo: AFP/Robyn Beck

What's on

WEEKLY PREDICTIONS

MARCH 2 - 8, 2015

AUNG MYIN KYAW

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Tel: 09-731-35632, Email: williameast@gmail.com

ART

Until March 3 "Contemporary Art". A collection of artwork by 14 Myanmar contemporary artists. Yangon Gallery, People's Park, Ahlone Road and Pyay Road 10am-6pm

March 1-22 Yangon Art and Heritage Festival. Various events at venues across the city (see page 54). For more information visit www.yangonartandheritage.com

March 1-10 "CNK Solo 2015" by Artist Chan Nyein Kyaw. Featuring over 60 landscapes depicting rural Myanmar. Gallery 65, 65 Yawmingyi Road, Dagon 10am-6pm

March 1-15 "Building Histories". Nine contemporary artists from Southeast Asia, five local artists and four artists from neighbors countries tell new histories linked to the old. Goethe-Villa, 8 Ko Min Ko Chin Road (next to the Golden Butterfly Hotel), Bahan 10am-7pm

March 1-7 "About Yangon: Extension" 2nd solo show by artist MKM, featuring a collection of acrylic paintings. Lokanat Galleries, 62 Pansodan Street (1st floor), Kyauktada 10am-6pm

March 1-8 "My Past, My Self". Solo show by abstract artist Thar Gyi as part of the Yangon Art and Heritage Festival. River Gallery 2, 33-35, 37th and 38th Street 4-6pm

March 2-8 "Like Flower Like Leaf" art by female artists in celebration of International Women's Day. Think Art Gallery, 23 Nawaday Street, Dagon 10am-6pm

March 2-8 "Myanmar Muse" an exhibition curated by Zwe Mon and Sue Sue. Pansodan Scene, 144 Pansodan Street, Kyauktada 10am-6pm

March 6-7 "As they see it." Photographs by children who have been taking part in workshops on Lanthit Jetty. A silent auction of the photographs will raise funds to gift each child with a camera of their own. Helping Hands, 928 Ngar Htat Gyi Pagoda Street 6-9pm March 6, 10am-6pm March 7

FILM

Start times at Mingalar (1, 2), Top Royal, Shae Shaung (1, 2) and Nay Pyi Taw cinemas are 10am, 12:30pm, 3:30pm, 6:30pm and 9:30pm.

Start times at Junction Square and Junction Maw Tin are 9:30am, 12:30pm, 3:30pm and 6:30pm daily and 9:30am, 12:30pm, 3:30pm, 6:30pm and 9:30pm on Friday and Saturday.

Start times at Mingalar San Pya are 10am,

MARCH 2 - 8

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

12:30pm, 3:30pm, 6:30pm and 9:30pm.

Nay Pyi Taw Cinema, near Sule Pagoda *Black Hat*. Directed by Michael Mann. American action thriller.

Rock Angel. Directed by Puttipong Pomsaka Na-Sakonnakorn. Thai drama. *I Fine Thank You Love You*. Directed by Mez Tharatorn. Thai comedy drama.

Mingalar Cinema 2, at Dagon Center 2, Myaynigone *Snow Girl and the Dark Crystal*. Directed by Peter Pau and Zhao Tianyu. 3D fantasy-adventure.

Shae Shaung Cinema, Sule Pagoda Road, Kyauktada *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. Directed by Matthew Vaughn. Spy action comedy. *Snow Girl and the Dark Crystal*.

Junction Square Cineplex, Kamaryut *Jupiter Ascending*. Directed by Lana and Andy Wachowski. Space opera.

Junction Mawtin, Lanmadav *Extreme Fox*. Directed by Wellson Chin. Chinese ghost story.

Mingalar San Pya Cineplex, Phone Gyi Street and Anawrahta, Lanmadav *Kingsman: The Secret Service* *Snow Girl and the Dark Crystal*.

MUSIC

March 2 Monday Blues. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan 9:30-11:30pm

March 3 Myanmar Girls Acoustic Set (concert). Cocoon Café & Bar, 22/24 Shin Saw Pu, corner of Baho Road, Sanchaung 7:30pm

March 3 Songwriter toolkit workshop. Experienced songwriter Adam Nicholas shares some of the basic concepts of songwriting including tricks that will help you develop your ideas into full songs. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan 3:30pm

MISC

March 2 Trivia night. Free beer pitcher for round winners and winning team gets a K30,000 bar tab. 50th Bar, 50th Street (lower block) 8pm

March 2-8 Yangon Women's Festival - various events at venues across the city (see page 54).

March 3 Gallery conversation and drinks. Pansodan Gallery, 289 Pansodan Street, Kyauktada 7pm-late

AQUARIUS | Jan 20 - Feb 18



This week, focus on bringing your vision for a better future into being. Believe in the possibility of meaningful, substantial and sustainable

change. Of course, it will not come overnight. Start with small steps: make the phone call you have been putting off, do some de-cluttering and sort out your finances.

GEMINI | May 21 - June 20



Use the gift of freedom that has been bestowed upon you for self-betterment. Be sure to do good - not imaginary good but real good. Don't

forget your social responsibilities. This week, do not be afraid to ask for help in dealing with a challenge at work. Learn the name of those who open doors for you every day.

LIBRA | Sept 23 - Oct 22



Accept a challenge with enthusiasm this week, and you will reap significant rewards. You may have been struggling to make a difficult

decision, but the full moon will bring clarity to light the way. Do not respond to a failure with sorrow: Embrace the opportunity for learning that comes from making mistakes. Avoid sugary foods.

PISCES | Feb 19 - March 20



An inability to choose is a hallmark of anxiety. Focus on better management of the distractions in your life this week and utilise the gift of concentration.

Your self-confidence has been lacking of late, but accept an invitation around the full moon of the 5th and you will find that you are more significant in the lives of others than you give yourself credit for.

CANCER | June 21 - July 22



No great work has ever been produced except after a long period of meditation. You may not be accustomed to

stillness, but now is the time to learn its merits. Turn off your phone and take some time out. Attending an event this week will increase your social network. When choosing a partner, ensure you value sincerity above intelligence.

SCORPIO | Oct 23 - Nov 21



A promotion is on the horizon, but only if you demonstrate learning from lessons past. Make one positive change this week.

Get away from your screen. Take a walk. Focus on self reflection, and know increased consciousness comes not only from thinking but from thinking about thinking. Routine poses a risk to our well-being - it's time to try something new.

ARIES | Mar 21 - Apr 19



The circle of the full moon is always full of incidents. Be wary of making hasty decisions around the 5th, for the matter concerning

you is not one that should be handled lightly. The time has come to affirm your own aspirations. Know that man's destiny is nowhere spelled out. You will receive some good news towards the end of the week.

LEO | July 23 - Aug 22



A good leader is one who uses influence over power. Understand that to be a successful leader you also need to be a

follower. You will have to make some sacrifices this week: Everything in life has a price. Matters of love have been concerning you of late, but the full moon will relieve you of your anxiety. Buy a potted plant.

SAGITTARIUS | Nov 22 - Dec 21



All great art is in conflict with the society within which it exists. Do not be afraid to express yourself as an individual, even if you are

met with resistance. Be prepared to face the unexpected as turbulence arises around the full moon of the 5th. Challenge yourself to take on a big responsibility and you will be opulently rewarded.

TAURUS | Apr 20 - May 20



The first step to attaining wisdom is to have a clear grasp of reality. Believe that reason is a better guide than emotion. Life cannot be fully

enjoyed when one eye is always open in the spirit of cautiousness: Remember that beautiful music can only be appreciated with both eyes closed. Be wary of a strange-looking fellow on the eve of the full moon.

VIRGO | Aug 23 - Sept 22



No matter your age, a creative mind that is full of desire will always be a youthful one. Do not view your current instability as a

problem. Instead, delight in the sense of freedom that comes with a lack of routine. Surround yourself with creativity. Visit a gallery. Let yourself be inspired. Let integrity guide you when confronted with a challenge later in the week.

CAPRICORN | Dec 22 - Jan 19



Difficult times are ahead. Retain self-control at all times, as this is the only way to remain energetic and keep your mind free from

fear. It's time to transform boredom into creative activity. Selflessly helping others will bring great happiness this week. Expect big changes in your love life, but ensure you keep communication simple to avoid misunderstanding.

HAPPY CHINESE NEW YEAR 2015 春

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Book Review

A history of Buddhism in colonial Burma

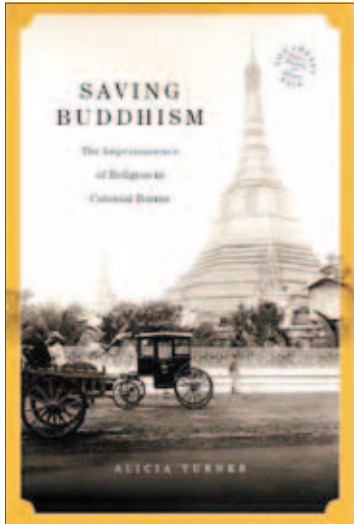
Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma
Alicia Turner
2014, 221 pages

AMAURY LORIN

MOST academic research fails to attract much attention beyond a narrow circle of devotees, more's the pity. But the interested reader will profit greatly from a fascinating work just published: *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* by American historian Alicia Turner. Turner is Associate Professor of Humanities and Religious Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada, and editor of *The Journal of Burma Studies*. Her synthesis, presented by the author on January 18 at Pansodan Scene in downtown Yangon, allows an in-depth understanding of the roots of today's complex Myanmar.

It took a whole decade of delving into abstruse sources – newspapers, Buddhist journals, donation lists, colonial reports – to provide Turner with the material to write her book. She explores the fluid nature of *sāsana* (“the life of the Buddha’s teachings”), identity and religion through a study of Buddhist lay associations from 1890 to 1920. The period covered, then, begins just after the fall of the monarchy in Mandalay in 1885 ended “the lineage of royal Buddhist patronage”. What can we learn from it?

First, in seeking to understand how British colonialism, from 1824 to 1948, transformed local ideas and categories, Turner reinvestigates the key role religion played in the colonial encounter, not only as a mode of passive



response to foreign domination, but as an ordering category for colonial rule itself. In other words, Turner’s book confirms that the social dynamics in a colonial situation are far more complex than a confrontation of racial groups perceived solely in terms of antagonism. Many interactions occur at all levels, including the religious, between the coloniser and the colonised, learning from each other through daily contact – even if the gap between the goals of the colonial state and the Buddhist worldview created an irreconcilable dissonance.

Second, the book argues that a concern that Buddhism was in decline during the colonial period helped create a new sense of identity for Myanmar people, but one different from what is today called “nationalism”. For Turner, the idea of a solid Myanmar nation is problematic. This nation is not as old or as absolute as histories want us to believe. The author convincingly defends the idea of the

existence of a “moral community” and a “sense of collective belonging” rather than a nation defined by religion.

Third, this transformation of Buddhism at the turn of the 20th century caused a massive social movement, according to Turner. Indeed, Myanmar people felt that colonialism was a sign that knowledge of the Buddha’s *sāsana* was dangerously slipping away. This fear of decline inspired action to prevent its irreparable loss, especially regarding morals, dress, manners, respect for elders and conduct – drinking alcohol and gambling. For instance, the European practice of wearing shoes at pagodas quickly became a sensitive issue. More worrying, “[Boys] abandoned studying in the monasteries to attend government schools in hopes of a lucrative career as a clerk. The monks no longer held the same respect.”

Amazing stories of Buddhists in the colonial period – from petitions for vegetarianism done in the name of animals, to girls chanting the *Abhidhamma* (the higher teaching of the Buddha) in processions, to the creation of Buddhist elementary and high schools – show how active and engaged people were at that time, and make *Saving Buddhism* a very lively book.

History usefully teaches us the instability of categories. Turner’s critical interrogation of the terms “religion” and “nation” in Myanmar’s case provokes a refreshing effect. A major contribution to ongoing studies on comparative colonialism, religious transformations, nation, and identity in mainland Southeast Asia, *Saving Buddhism* finally challenges us not to take things for granted.

Monument Books \$54.00

Literary awards seek to keep Myanmar writing

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CONTINUING its efforts to raise literary standards and attract new readers, the Tun Foundation last week held its ninth literary award ceremony at the headquarters of Myanmar Banks Association in Yangon.

Foundation president U Thein Tun presented a lifetime literary award, three manuscript awards and prizes to 13 authors on February 21.

“The aims of the Tun Foundation Literary Awards are to promote the Myanmar literary world, to encourage the emergence of better literature for the nation and to increase the number of readers. The prizes encourage the winners to make greater literary efforts,” he told participants.

The foundation selected the winners from 90 books and 30 manuscripts (both in Myanmar and English) published in 2013, in 12 genres, including the economy, environment, youth, history, knowledge and culture.

“We selected U Myint Kywel, who has been contributing to Myanmar literature for years, for the lifetime award,” said U Thein Htun.

Other winners were Thain Lwin,



The lifetime achievement award is accepted on behalf of writer U Myint Kywel at the Tun Foundation Literary Awards on February 21. Photo: Thiri Lu

Mg Wint Thu, Nay Win San, Lal Twin Thar Saw Chit, Mg Mg Han, U Thant, Mg Ko Ko, Nat Mauk Tun Shain, Dr Chit, U Win Htain, U Sain Mg Oo, Paragu, Kyi Kyi Hla, Kaung Thant, Nyi Nyi Pe, Mg Nwe Than, Dr Kyaw Swe Oo and Mal Ka Lay.

U Win Htain, who won the award for the environment category with *Hygiene and Sanitation Manual for Food Safety*, said he wanted to share his knowledge

about the benefits of hygiene in rural areas.

Mal Kalay, whose *Nargis Family* manuscript was selected, said, “This is about the children of a family devastated by Cyclone Nargis. The prize will encourage me to write more for children in future.”

The Tun Foundation has presented a total of 98 awards for books and 40 for manuscripts since 2006.

Fashion Focus



Vintage glamour sweeps the red carpet

Hollywood’s A-list actresses oozed old-school elegance on the Oscars red carpet on February 22, even as rain tumbled down on Tinseltown’s top fashion parade.

Celebs covered up at this year’s event in an array of long, vintage style gowns. A cool colour palette proved the popular choice: Actress Amy Adams wore a pale blue strapless gown while singer Jennifer Lopez glittered in a silver trailing gown. Another key trend for the ladies was lots of pearls and beads. Many of the gowns seen on the red carpet were embellished to the max.

Actresses Margot Robbie and Reese Witherspoon bucked the trend, opting for simple monochrome dresses, while Scarlett Johansson rocked a curve-hugging Versace halter gown in emerald green. Singer Rita Ora ticked all the vintage glamour boxes with a trailing midnight blue gown.

And the men got in on the act too: *Grand Budapest Hotel* actor Adrian Brody looked sharp in a black and white Dolce & Gabbana tux and Benedict Cumberbatch, who missed out on the best actor trophy, channelled 007 in an ivory-white jacket and bowtie.

Photos: AFP



Awards ceremony recognises Myanmar's photography talent

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THE 7th Yangon Photo Festival came to a close with an awards ceremony at the Institut Francais on February 21, during which prizes were awarded for the best photo essays submitted by Myanmar photographers.

Over 1200 people attended the awards ceremony, presided over by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, where six winners were recognised from a total of 80 entries.

Min Zayyar, a photojournalist from Reuters News agency, won two awards, scooping first prize for his photo essay "Peace be with you" as well as winning sixth place with "In need of loving care", both of which exposed the living standards in IDP camps in Rakhine State. The photographer said he did not expect to win when he entered the competition.

"I didn't think I would win - the only reason I entered is because I wanted to show my photos on the big screen to a lot of people," he said.

Min Zayyar, who also won two

awards at last year's festival, said that he didn't think his career as a professional photojournalist gave him a better chance of winning the competition than other photographers.

"In a way it is easier for photojournalists because we come across a lot of interesting subjects while we are working, but on the other hand, as we are always on assignments we don't have the time to take photos like other photographers do," he said.

The photographer won a spot on a week-long photography workshop and his photos will be displayed as part of an exhibition in Paris.

Second prize was awarded to Khon Lat for his series "Fog of war", and third prize went to Pyay Kyaw Aung's "Give him a chance". Ko Myo won fourth prize with "Brothers" and fifth prize was won by Sai Htin Lin Htet for his essay titled "A new family".

Third-prize winner Pyay Kyaw Aung's series documented the life of a young girl who lives and works at a rubbish dump with her aim of supporting her younger brother through education.

"She is so desperate to go to

school but her family had to take her out of school due to their low income. But she still wants her brother to get an education so she works hard every day at the dump collecting things to sell," said the photographer, who lived with the girl's family at the dump for nine days to take the photos.

But despite being recognized as one of Myanmar's best photographers, Pyay Kyaw Aung said he didn't think he stood a chance of winning a prize, and puts his win down to his subject not his photography skills.

"Many of the contestants are much better than me, so I didn't think I'd win. It's not just the prize I'm happy about, it's more about the fact that my efforts have been recognised," said the photographer, who was awarded a Canon Camera 6D.

The Yangon Photo Festival was held from February 13 to 21 at venues across the city. Under the patronage of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the purpose of the annual event is to exhibit a selection of the best works produced around the world and to nurture a new generation of Myanmar photographers.



The Yangon Photo Festival judging panel, presided over by Aung San Suu Kyi, examine photos during Yangon Photo Night on February 21 at the Institut Francais. Photo: Thiri Lu

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Nosey neighbours rejoice as homeowners open their doors

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RESIDENTS of downtown Yangon will be opening their homes to the public as part of the Yangon Art and Heritage Festival. Visitors will get a chance to nose around eight houses and one historic residence at weekends during the festival, being held from March 1 to 22.

The project, entitled *La Casa: Contemporary Art in Domestic Spaces*, aims to draw attention to important heritage sites that are often forgotten or not considered as important as larger heritage buildings.

La Casa is the brainchild of artists and curators Diana Valarezo and Jose Abad Lorente, who started the project - which blends contemporary art exhibitions with non-conventional spaces such as private homes, hospitals and schools - in Beijing in 2000.

"The idea of *La Casa* came to me in 2000 while I was in China. At that time, it was difficult to hold art exhibitions in Beijing. My friend Diana and I came up with the idea of exhibiting in people's houses. It became a tradition," said Lorente, who will also be opening his house during the festival.

A collection of paintings from China, Europe and India will be displayed in his two-storey house in Lanmadaw township.

"The house is neither beautiful nor old. But it looks nice with interesting furniture and the kitchen is upstairs,



Art will be exhibited in eight homes around the city as part of the Yangon Art and Heritage Festival. Photos: Aung Htay Hlaing

which is funny," said artist Jose, who has been renting the house for over a year.

The British Ambassador's Residence on Alanpya Pagoda Road will also be open to visitors. The residence, which features in the book *30 Heritage Buildings of Yangon*, was built in 1927 by the general manager of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. He called the house Belmont and followed it with additional homes called Belwood and Belstone. Belmont is today the residence of the British ambassador, and senior embassy employees are accommodated in the residential compound.

"The residence has interesting history. It has been home to ambassadors

since 1948, before which the head of Irrawaddy Flotilla Company lived here. During the Second World War, General Aung San stayed upstairs for a while. While he was living here, he suffered from malaria and was sent to the hospital, where he met his wife, Daw Khin Kyi," said Andrew Patrick, ambassador of the British Embassy, who lives in the house.

"I am very pleased to open it for the festival. It is very beautiful building," he said. "In particular the garden is very nice. I hope people have a chance to look at it."

Another home being showcased by the project is number 182, 29th Street. The attractive four-storey dwelling, built in 1962, will exhibit a collection



The British Ambassador's Residence on Alanpya Pagoda Road is one of the houses opening its doors to visitors as part of the Yangon Art and Heritage Festival.

of postcards from 1970 to 1980.

"It is a really nice collection of propaganda postcards, political letters and love letters. During the time of the regime, the artists who illustrated and painted the postcards were very creative. Old people might recognise them but I don't think young people will have seen them before," said Bob Percival, a freelance writer who has lived on the top floor of the building - a lovely space with lots of light and polished wooden floorboards - for two-and-a-half years.

Artist San Lin Tun is also opening the doors to his home at number 212, 31st Street. The 20-year-old house will display a collection of poems about Yangon written by British poets dur-

ing the colonial era.

"It is strange that the exhibition is being held in private homes. I have never opened my house to the public before," said San Lin Tun. "I hope the project will stimulate visitors' desire to make their houses pleasing."

The Yangon Art and Heritage festival, titled *My Yangon My Home*, will be held from March 1 to 22 at locations around the city. The *La Casa* project is part of the Yangon Art Route, which will create a downtown map of Yangon with all the galleries located in the area. The map will also include the exhibitions in private houses.

For more information, visit www.yangonartandheritage.com

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Festival celebrates women in music

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IN a celebration culminating in International Women's Day, the Yangon Women's Festival will be held from March 2 to 8, presented by Stork Agency and Developing Music. It will promote women in music, the arts and public life. Throughout a week of visual arts exhibitions, music concerts, movie screenings and workshops, the festival will create a platform for women's contributions and voices.

"Our ambition is to support the role of women in culture but also to provide a platform for expression and discussion for the development of women in arts and society," said Elodie Sobczak,

project manager of Stork Agency.

At least two events each day will be held during the festival, as well as two exhibitions. Artists in various fields such as visual arts, music or cinema will present workshops, and Yejimin will host a special event on women's health and hygiene. Every night will host a music event with live performances by Boys of Melody and Myanmar Girls, as well as events with DJs such as Janette Slack, who will perform at Gekko and Union.

"Participants will also be able to meet and exchange with a broad range of people as well as learning new skills and knowledge by participating to our talks and workshops," he said.

Kayan Beauties, directed by Aung Ko Latt, will be screened in Mingalar San Pya Cineplex. The festival will close on International Women's Day with a special family event at the Institut Francais with many activities and performances, including Acrobatic Chinlone, a special concert by Wynne Lay.

"Women in Myanmar have always been at the forefront of society and political progress. Throughout the country's history, women from all regions and denominations have played key roles in the country's successes. Within media, education, business or politics, women are increasingly influential and encouraging changes in societies," he said.

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Faking it with sausages



food

PHYO ARBIDANS

phyo.arbidans@gmail.com

T APAS are the perfect finger food for parties and easy to prepare. But Spanish tapas dishes often include cured meats or chorizo sausage, which aren't easy to find in Myanmar – so when I'm cooking tapas I have to be creative. Sometimes I use minced meat mixed with spices, but often I have to conjure a few tricks in the kitchen. This week I'm sharing with you a great trick for making your own spiced sausages using those available in the supermarket. And it doesn't just work for tapas-style dishes: These spicy sausages also make great hotdogs for a stress-free weekend lunch. Kinds love them, my husband loves them and I get to settle down with my book for some me-time. Perfect.



SMOKEY SPICED SAUSAGES

- 1 pack frozen chicken frankfurter sausages
- 2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 2 teaspoons chilli powder
- 1 large onion
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 bay leaves

- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 cup pasata

Defrost the sausages at room temperature. Peel and slice the onions into rings. Set aside.

When the sausages have defrosted, prick each sausage gently with a fork a few times. Add a tablespoon of olive oil and one bay leaf to a frying pan and sauté the sausages for 1 minute over a medium heat until they are coated with oil.

Add 1/3 cup of water to the frying pan with the sausages and cover with a lid. Cook until the water has almost evaporated from the pan. Remove the lid from the pan and fry the sausages until the water has completely evaporated. Transfer them to a plate and leave to cool for a few minutes.

Add the remaining olive oil to the frying pan with another bay leaf and fry the onion over a high heat. Cover the pan with a lid but check the onion from time to time, stirring when it starts to caramelize and ensuring it doesn't burn. When the onion has completely caramelised and turned a pale brownish colour, remove the lid and turn the heat down to medium. Let the onions sizzle for a minute.

Meanwhile, slice the sausages. When the onions are ready, add the sausages to the frying pan with the smoked paprika and chilli powder. Fry for 2-3 minutes until the aroma of the spices is released. Make a small well in the frying pan by pushing all of the ingredients to the side of the pan, and add the tomato paste. Fry for a few seconds before mixing together all of the ingredients. Add the pasata to the pan and simmer for 15 minutes.

Serve with cooked pasta, rice or bread.



Photos: Phyo

CHORIZO-INSPIRED SPICED SAUSAGE

- 1 pack frozen chicken frankfurter sausages
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 2 teaspoons chilli powder or 1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Defrost the sausages at room temperature. When the sausages have defrosted, prick each sausage gently with a fork a few times. Add a tablespoon of olive oil and one bay leaf to a frying pan and sauté the sausages for 1 minute over a medium heat until they are coated with oil.

Add 1/3 cup of water to the frying pan with the sausages and

cover with a lid. Cook until the water has almost evaporated from the pan. Remove the lid from the pan and fry the sausages until the water has completely evaporated. Transfer them to a plate and leave to cool for a few minutes.

Slice the sausages and put them back into the frying pan. Fry them again with the spices for 2 minutes.

Restaurant Review

CHARLOTTE ROSE

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IT may be Thailand's most famous culinary export, but finding a decent pad thai has become a near impossible pursuit. Even in Bangkok, the greasy, soggy, MSG-infused glop found on every street corner and cherished by Kao San Road revellers and budget backpackers alike may call itself pad thai, but it's something of a stretch.

My perpetual quest to find a pad thai that won't induce a coronary thrombosis came to an end last week when I visited Bangkok's Pad Thai Thip Samai. The unassuming restaurant has become an institution

among locals thanks to its legendary noodle dishes, which in 2014 were voted the world's Best Noodles in the Chowtzer fast feasts awards, which aim to find the tastiest foods around the world.

Despite having been open for nearly 50 years, Pad Thai Thip Samai still draws a crowd every night of the week. When I visited people were queuing all the way down the street, which is a sight in itself; until you taste the food it's hard to believe anyone is prepared to wait so long for a plate of noodles.

After a thirty minute wait I was eventually seated at one of the roadside tables. It has to be said, this isn't the place to go for a romantic

evening with your partner/recently acquired dreadlocked companion. Even if the utter chaos of the place doesn't bother you, only a narcissist could dally over their meal while being stared at by a queue of hungry people.

When it comes to the food, Thip Sumai keeps it simple. There are four varieties of their signature pad thai available, but most opt for the "superb" version (80 Baht/US\$2.50), which comes wrapped in a whisper-thin omelette. This is how Pad Thai should be cooked. Soft rice noodles cooked with shrimp fat, which give them a pink hue and a rich flavour; large, juicy prawns; crunchy bean sprouts. Just add chilli flakes and a squeeze of lime. It's easy to see why

the place is packed with locals: Thip Sumai's noodles strike the perfect balance of sweet, salty and sour flavours that are central to Thai cooking but, sadly, difficult to find, even in Thai restaurants.

There's only one beverage option: An icy, coconutty, slushy drink (30 Baht/\$1) that is a perfect, refreshing accompaniment to a filling noodle dish. I drank three, and I don't even like coconut.

If you're headed to Bangkok for the weekend, Pad Thai Thip Samai is a must-visit – both for authentic, freshly prepared Thai food, and for the smug feeling you'll get when you next see a bearded backpacker naively devouring a platter of oily, street-side slop.

Pad Thai Thip Samai

313 Thanon Mahachai Road, Phra Nakorn district, Bangkok

Restaurant Rating

★★★★★

Food	9
Beverage	8
Service	7
Value	10
X-factor	8



Photos: Charlotte Rose



Revlon staff



Models



Lin Zar Ni Zaw(right) and her daughter

Girls night out

Guests and models attended the Revlon product launch at the Luxury Yacht Hotel on February 14.



Aunty Win



Min Zayya Oo



Lin Bo Bo and Khine Khine



Celebrating Myanmar's photography talent

The 7th Yangon Photo Festival came to a close on February 21 with an awards ceremony at the Institut Francais, during which prizes were awarded for the best photo essays submitted by Myanmar photographers. Over 1200 people attended the awards ceremony, presided over by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, where six winners were recognised from a total of 80 entries.





Myo Lwin and guests



Shafiq ur Rahman and the Da Silvas



HE Essa Yousef Al-Shamli, Ahmad Almuzaini and Fawaz Al Shemeri



Myint Mon, Zar Chi, Zar Li, Mya Mya Zaw and Aye Aye Khaine



Feviel Beveksi and Sophia Kruger

Kuwaiti National Day

Guests gathered at the Sedona Hotel on February 25 to celebrate Kuwaiti National Day.



MANGO

BARCELONA

DRESS
₹42,900

MANGO.COM

YANGON, BLAZON DEPARTMENT STORE, TAW WIN CENTER

DOMESTIC FLIGHT SCHEDULES

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

YANGON TO NYAUNG U				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
K7 282	Daily	6:00	7:20	
YJ 891	1,2,4,5,6,7	6:00	7:20	
YJ 909	5	6:00	7:35	
YH 909	1,3,4,6	6:00	8:25	
YH 917	1,3,4,5,6,7	6:10	7:45	
YJ 811	3	6:15	7:35	
YJ 891	3	6:30	7:50	
YJ 881	7	6:30	7:50	
YH 917	2	6:30	8:05	
YH 909	5	6:30	8:05	
YJ 801	6	7:00	8:20	
K7 242	Daily	7:00	8:20	
YH 909	7	7:00	8:35	
7Y 131	Daily	7:15	8:35	
7Y 121	1	8:20	9:40	
YJ 881	3	9:30	10:50	
Y5 649	Daily	10:30	11:50	
K7 264	Daily	14:30	16:40	
YH 731	7	14:30	16:50	
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	17:10	
YH 731	1,2,3,4,5,6	14:30	17:25	
W9 129	1,3,6	15:30	17:35	
W9 211	4	15:30	17:40	

YANGON TO MYITKYINA				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 829	5	7:00	9:40	
YH 835	7	7:00	10:05	
YH 831	4,6	7:00	10:05	
YH 826	3	7:00	10:05	
YH 835	1	8:00	11:00	
YJ 201	1,2,4	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	
YJ 201	3	13:00	15:50	

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

NYAUNG U TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 892	1,2,4,5,6,7	7:35	10:15	
YH 918	1,3,4,5,6,7	7:45	10:45	
YH 918	2	8:05	10:10	
YH 910	5	8:05	10:10	
YJ 892	3	8:05	10:45	
YJ 881	7	8:05	10:10	
YJ 881	1,2,4,5	8:20	10:25	
YH 910	1,3,4,6	8:25	9:45	
YH 910	7	8:35	9:55	
YH 801	6	8:35	9:55	
K7 242	Daily	8:35	11:45	
7Y 131	Daily	8:50	11:30	
7Y 121	Daily	9:55	14:10	
K7 283	Daily	10:10	11:30	
YJ 881	3	11:05	12:25	
Y5 650	Daily	13:55	15:15	
YH 732	7	16:50	18:10	
K7 265	Daily	16:55	18:15	
7Y 242	Daily	17:25	18:45	
W9 129	1,3,6	17:50	19:10	
YH 732	1,2,3,4,5,6	17:25	18:45	

MYITKYINA TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 832	4,6	11:55	14:45	
YH 836	7	11:55	14:45	
YH 827	3	11:55	14:45	
YH 830	5	12:30	14:55	
YH 836	1	12:50	15:40	
YJ 202	1,2,4	14:05	16:55	
YJ 202	3	16:05	18:55	
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	1,2,4,5,6	6:00	8:50	
K7 282	Daily	6:00	9:00	
YH 917	1,3,4,5,6,7	6:10	9:35	
YH 917	2	6:30	9:00	
YH 909	5	6:30	9:00	
YJ 891	3	6:30	9:20	
YJ 881	7	6:30	8:45	
YJ 881	1,2,4,5	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	
YJ 835	1	8:00	9:25	
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	7	10:30	11:40	
YJ 751	5	10:45	11:55	
YJ 761	1,2,3,4	11:00	12:10	
YJ 233	6	11:00	12:10	
YJ 751	3	11:15	12:25	
YH 727	1	11:15	12:40	
YH 737	3,5,7	11:15	12:40	
7Y 941	1,2,4,6	11:45	13:55	
K7 828	1,3,5	12:30	13:45	
K7 822	2,4,7	12:30	13:45	
K7 264	Daily	14:30	15:45	
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	15:40	
YH 731	Daily	14:30	15:55	
W9 129	1,3,6	15:30	16:40	

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

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

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

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

YANGON TO LASHIO				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YJ 751	5	10:45	13:00	
YH 729	2,4,6	11:00	13:00	
YJ 751	3	11:15	15:00	
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 835	7	7:00	10:05	
YH 831	6	7:00	10:05	
YH 831	4	7:00	11:00	
YH 826	3	7:00	11:00	
YH 835	1	8:00	11:55	
W9 251	2,5	11:30	15:25	

HEHO TO YANGON				
Flight	Days	Dep	Arr	
YH 910	5	9:00	10:10	
YH 918	2	9:00	10:10	
YJ 881	7	9:00	10:10	
YJ 891	1,2,4,5,6,7	9:05	10:15	
K7 283	Daily	9:15	11:30	
YJ 881	1,2,4,5	9:15	10:25	
W9 201	Daily	9:25	10:35	
YH 836	1	9:25	15:40	
K7 243	Daily	9:30	11:45	
YH 918	1,3,4,5,6,7	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	15:00	17:00	
YJ 762	1,2	15:50	18:00	
YH 732	7	15:55	18:10	
7Y 241	Daily	15:55	18:45	
YH 732	1,2,3,4,5,6	15:55	18:45	
K7 829	1,3,5	16:10	17:25	
YH 728	1	16:00	18:10	
YJ 752	3	16:20	17:30	
YJ 602	6	16:25	17:35	
K7 264	Daily	16:30	18:15	
YH 738	3,5,7	16:40	18:50	
YJ 752	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	

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	1,2,3,4,5,6	18:20	20:15
PG 704	7	19:30	21:45
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	1,2,3,4,5,6	16:45	17:35
PG 703	7	17:55	18:45
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
SO 997	Daily	10:25	15:10
3K 582	Daily	11:45	16:20
MI 533	2,4,6	13:35	20:50
MI 519	Daily	16:40	21:15
3K 584	2,3,5	19:30	0:10+1

SINGAPORE TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
TR 2822	Daily	7:20	8:45
Y5 2234	Daily	7:20	8:50
SO 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	10:40

YANGON TO KUALA LUMPUR			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 501	1,2,3,5,6	14:00	18:00
AK 505	Daily	8:30	12:45
MH 741	Daily	12:15	16:30
8M 9506	Daily	12:15	16:30
MH 743	Daily	16:00	20:15
8M 9508	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
MH 740	Daily	10:05	11:15
8M 9505	Daily	10:05	11:15
8M 502	1,2,3,5,6	19:10	20:10
8M 9507	Daily	13:55	15:05
MH 742	Daily	13:55	15:05
AK 502	Daily	17:20	18:25

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

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

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

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

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

TAIPEI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CI 7915	Daily	7:00	9:50

YANGON TO KUNMING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 416	Daily	12:30	15:55
MU 2012	3	12:40	18:50
MU 2032	1,2,4,5,6,7	14:50	18:15

KUNMING TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2011	3	8:25	11:50
CA 415	Daily	11:10	11:30
MU 2031	1,2,4,5,6,7	13:30	14:00

YANGON TO HANOI			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 956	1,3,5,6,7	19:10	21:25

HANOI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 957	1,3,5,6,7	16:40	18:10

YANGON TO HO CHI MINH CITY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 942	2,4,7	14:25	17:05

HO CHI MINH CITY TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 943	2,4,7	11:45	13:25

YANGON TO DOHA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 919	1,4,6	7:55	11:40

DOHA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 918	3,5,7	19:45	04:59+1

YANGON TO SEOUL			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
OZ 770	4,7	0:50	8:50
KE 472	Daily	23:55	07:45+1

SEOUL TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KE 471	Daily	18:30	22:30
OZ 769	3,6	19:30	23:40

YANGON TO HONG KONG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KA 251	Daily	1:10	05:25

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
8M 7702	Daily	23:55	07:45+1

INCHEON TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 723	1,3,5,6	11:00	11:55
8M 7701	Daily	18:30	22:30

YANGON TO CHIANG MAI			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 251	2,4,6	6:15	8:05
7Y 305	1,5	11:00	12:50
W9 607	4,7	14:30	16:20

CHIANG MAI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 252	2,4,6	9:25	10:15
7Y 306	1,5	13:45	14:35
W9 608	4,7	17:20	18:10

YANGON TO GAYA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 601	1,3,5,6	10:30	11:50

GAYA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 602	1,3,5,6	12:50	16:00

MANDALAY TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 710	Daily	14:15	16:40

BANGKOK TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 709	Daily	12:05	13:25

MANDALAY TO SINGAPORE			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MI 533	2,4,6	15:45	20:50
Y5 2233	1,2,4,5,6	7:50	14:15

SINGAPORE TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 2234	Daily	7:20	16:30
MI 533	2,4,6	11:30	14:50

MANDALAY TO DON MUEANG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 245	Daily	12:50	15:15

DON MUEANG TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 244	Daily	10:55	12:20

MANDALAY TO KUNMING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2030	Daily	13:50	16:40

KUNMING TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2029	Daily	12:55	12:50

NAY PYI TAW TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 722	1,2,3,4,5	19:45	22:45

BANGKOK TO NAY PYI TAW			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 721	1,2,3,4,5	17:15	19:15

International Airlines

Air Asia (FD)
Tel: 09254049991-3

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

Air China (CA)
Tel: 666112, 655882

Air India
Tel: 253579-98, 254758. Fax 248175

Bangkok Airways (PG)
Tel: 255122, 255265. Fax: 255119

Biman Bangladesh Airlines (BG)
Tel: 371867-68. Fax: 371869

Condor (DE)
Tel: 370836-39 [ext: 303]

Dragonair (KA)
Tel: 255320, 255321. Fax: 255329

Golden Myanmar Airlines (Y5)
Tel: 09400446999, 09400447999
Fax: 8604051

Malaysia Airlines (MH)
Tel: 387648, 241007 [ext: 120, 121, 122]
Fax: 241124

Myanmar Airways International (8M)
Tel: 255260. Fax: 255305

Nok Airline (DD)
Tel: 255050, 255021. Fax: 255051

Qatar Airways (QR)
Tel: 379845, 379843, 379831. Fax: 379730

Singapore Airlines (SQ) / Silk Air (MI)
Tel: 255287-9. Fax: 255290

Thai Airways (TG)
Tel: 255491-6. Fax: 255223

Tiger Airline (TR)
Tel: 371383, 370836-39 [ext: 303]

Vietnam Airlines (VN)
Tel: 255066, 255088, 255068. Fax: 255086

Airline Codes

3K = Jet Star
8M = Myanmar Airways International
AK = Air Asia
BG = Biman Bangladesh Airlines
CA = Air China
CI = China Airlines
CZ = China Southern
DD = Nok Airline
FD = Air Asia
KA = Dragonair
KE = Korea Airlines
MH = Malaysia Airlines
MI = Silk Air
MU = China Eastern Airlines
NH = All Nippon Airways
PG = Bangkok Airways
QR = Qatar Airways
SQ = Singapore Airways
TG = Thai Airways
TR = Tiger Airline
VN = Vietnam Airline

Universal Crossword

Edited by Timothy E. Parker

UTTERLY FANTASTIC By David M. George

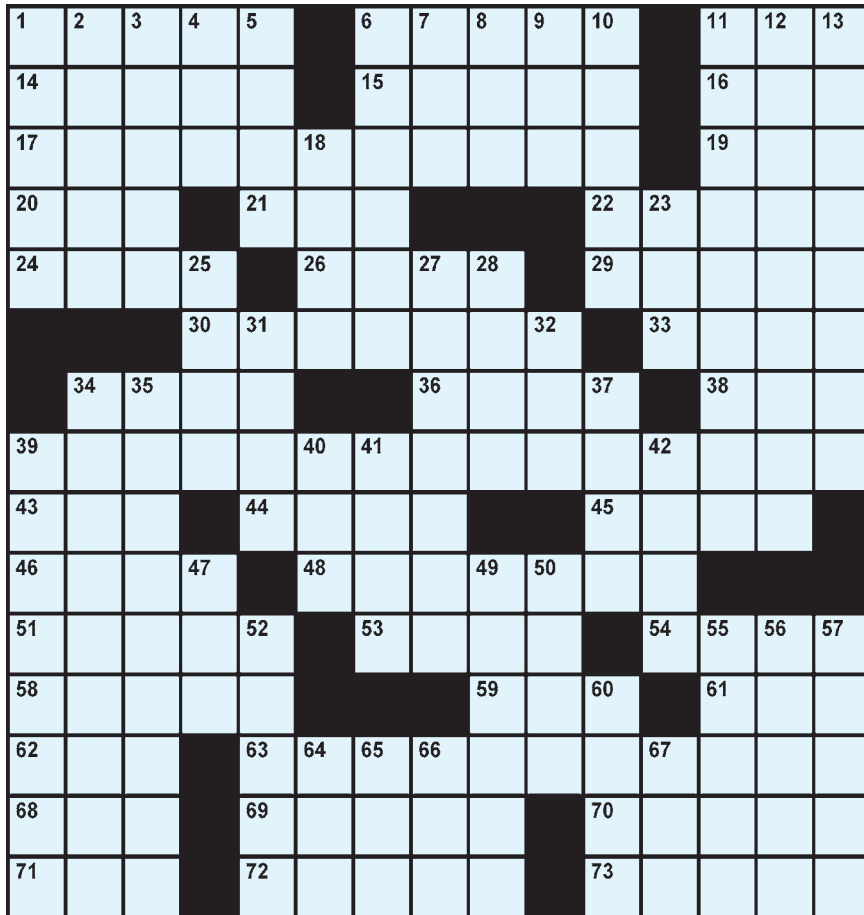
ACROSS

- 1 ___ on (encouraged)
- 6 Bump on the slopes
- 11 Fare carrier
- 14 Ready to fall out, as pages
- 15 Reproductive organ
- 16 Chef's phrase
- 17 Bad alley rolls
- 19 High, craggy hill
- 20 Commotion
- 21 Yolk ___ (egg part)
- 22 Ape from Borneo, briefly
- 24 ___ McNally
- 26 Angler's handled hook
- 29 More hobbled
- 30 Fill with confidence
- 33 "Give that ___ cigar!"
- 34 Dry to the bone
- 36 Area around the altar
- 38 Bench press unit
- 39 Yellowish gourd
- 43 Number that's its own square root
- 44 Cambodian currency
- 45 Coffee dispensers
- 46 Quick on one's feet
- 48 Noisy but comfy chair
- 51 Better balanced?
- 53 A shade of blue
- 54 Eggshell color
- 58 With feathers ruffled
- 59 Wall Street option
- 61 Chick's mom
- 62 Building annex, sometimes
- 63 Some water vessels
- 68 Spain's Costa del ___
- 69 Wicker willow
- 70 "The Sopranos" restaurateur
- 71 Give it a go
- 72 Poverty-stricken
- 73 Adjust, as a timer

- 3 Boarded, as a plane
- 4 Maximizing suffix
- 5 Not-so-great grades
- 6 Woman's headwear in the 18th century
- 7 Certain gametes
- 8 Guy's counterpart
- 9 Modern address
- 10 "Disinfect to Protect" brand
- 11 Multi-hulled craft
- 12 Solitude
- 13 Pie chart alternative
- 18 ___ to riches
- 23 Computer memory abbreviation

- 25 Where grass roots
- 27 Leg bones
- 28 Fingerboard ridge
- 31 Not once, poetically
- 32 Grammar has two
- 34 Bright part of a house?
- 35 Forever and ever
- 37 Bluish-green shade
- 39 Most domineering
- 40 Cut of meat
- 41 Nair rival, once
- 42 Encourage strongly
- 47 "Not ____, maybe later"

- 49 Table linens and such
- 50 Badly out-of-focus picture, e.g.
- 52 Military scout's job, for short
- 55 Casual conversations
- 56 Adjust, as laces
- 57 Not mounted, as a gem
- 60 Lift over snow
- 64 Take unfair advantage of
- 65 What a sudden death eliminates?
- 66 Danson of TV
- 67 Metal to be refined

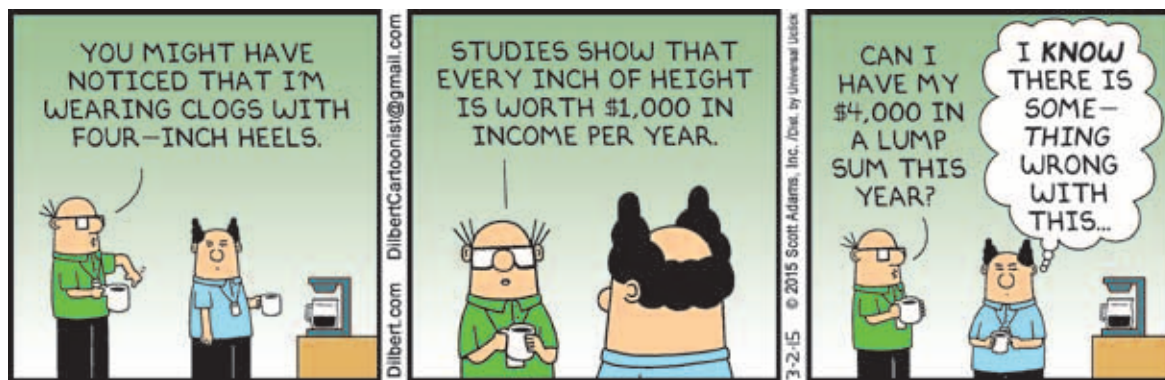


DOWN

- 1 "Pomp and Circumstance" composer
- 2 Hard Dutch cheese

DILBERT

BY SCOTT ADAMS



PEANUTS

BY CHARLES SCHULZ



CALVIN AND HOBBS

BY BILL WATTERSON

SUDOKU PACIFIC

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.



3/5

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally, even backward. Find them and **CIRCLE THEIR LETTERS ONLY**. DO NOT CIRCLE THE WORD. The leftover letters spell the Wonderword.

THE PATRIOTS WIN SUPER BOWL XLIX

Solution: 7 letters



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3/2

Amendola, Baldwin, Belichick, Blount, Bolden, Boyce, Brady, Branch, Butler, Carpenter, Carroll, Develin, Earl, Edelman, Garoppolo, Glendale, Gray, Gronkowski, Hightower, Hoomanawanui, Jones, Kearse, Kravitz, LaFell, Lynch, Missy Elliot, Nate, New England, Pass, Perry, Pete, Revis, Seahawks, Siliga, Slater, White, Wilson, Wright.

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Germany 9, Bogyoke Aung San Museum Road, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 548951, 548952, email: info@rangun.diplo.de

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ASEAN Coordinating Of. for the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force, 79, Taw Win st, Dagon Tsp. Tel: 225258.

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FOOTBALL

Ayeyarwady earns points at AFC Cup

KYAW ZIN HLAING AND
MATT ROEBUCK

MACEDONIAN striker Riste Naumov netted a brace to ensure Myanmar Football Federation Cup winners Ayeyarwady United returned home from Vientiane, Laos, with a valuable away-point in the 12th AFC Cup 2015 group stage, following the side's 2-2 draw with Lao Toyota FC on February 25.

Naumov had put the Myanmar side into the lead with a 21st-minute goal before the Balkan forward made it two in the 57th minute.

Lao Toyota FC's boss, former Myanmar manager David Booth, rang the changes on the hour mark, introducing substitute Sithideth Khanthavong to the match. Sithideth promptly rewarded his manager's faith by netting within a minute of his introduction.

Two minutes later, in the 65th minute, midfielder Phatthana Syvilay pulled the home side level.

Although points away from home in this second-tier Asian continental championship are a valued commodity, Ayeyarwady coach Marjan Sekulovski will feel at least a little disappointment not to have held onto their 2-0 lead to secure a valuable away win.

Ayeyarwady, who currently sit second in the Myanmar National League behind leaders Yangon United, have twice previously played in the AFC Cup, but finished at the bottom of

their group in 2012 and 2013.

This year, in addition to last year's Lao League runners-up, United will face the Maldives New Radiant FC and their next opponent, Indonesia Super League winners Persib Bandung.

Ayeyarwady will host Persib to a 3:30pm kickoff at the Thuwunna Stadium on March 11, while Lao Toyota travel to the Maldives capital for the second games in Group F.

'We must not waste our opportunities in the future.'

Kyri Naing

Yadanarbon FC coach

Meanwhile, 2014 Myanmar National League champion Yadanarbon FC lost to Malaysia's Pahang FA 3-2 in the AFC Cup Group G opening match, which was held at Mandalay Thiri Stadium in Mandalay on February 25.

Pahang striker Dickson Nwakaeme scored in the 6th and 12th minutes, giving his side an early lead before Yadanarbon earned goals on either side of halftime through a Damion Stewart own-goal in the 35th minute, followed by a Djedje Djawa penalty five minutes before the hour mark.

The latter goal, which saw Pahang captain Mohd Razman Roslan dismissed, brought the hosts level, but a late goal from substitute Gopinathan Ramachandra put Pahang FA back in the lead.

Yadanarbon coach Kyri Naing, whose side were defeated earlier this month by the Warriors from Singapore in the AFC Champions League preliminary-round playoffs, said the match against Pahang was a "close call".

"Early in the game we failed to deal with Conti and Nwakaeme, and they proved to be dangerous players," he said.

"The lesson we learned was the same as in our AFC Champions League qualifier: We must not waste our opportunities in the future."

Pahang FA coach Zainal Abidin Hassan called the game "tough" but added, "Our players settled down very quickly, which was exactly what I had hoped for."

"The goals got us off to a great start but I think it also led to a little too much relaxation in their mindset, letting Yadanarbon back into the game," he said.

"But after the equaliser we had to play one man down, and credit must go to my players. They showed their fighting spirit and found a way to the winning goal."

Yadanarbon FC will next face Hong Kong's South China FC at Mongkok Stadium in Hong Kong on March 11.



IN PICTURES

Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova returns the ball to Slovakia's Magdalena Rybarikova during a Women's Tennis Association tournament in Acapulco, Mexico, on February 26.

Photo: AFP

GOLF

In Iran, golf a game of elite

THE bumpy fairways and patchy putting surfaces - more burnt-out browns than grassy greens - are not much to look at. In Iran, however, this is golf at its finest.

In the same way that the streets of Tehran got new names when the Islamic republic dramatically came into being in 1979, so did the Engelhab ("Revolution" in Farsi) Sports Club.

Iran's only recognised golf course has had a fairly rough time since.

Somewhat starved of attention, and perhaps a greenkeeper, it lost five of its original 18 holes under an army land order - golfers now play five holes twice to make up the numbers.

But somehow the course has kept going despite few regular players. Some grumble and others joke at its unorthodox 13-hole layout.

"It's pretty terrible, but it's all we have," says Mehrdad, a 40-year-old businessman who splits his time between Iran, Canada and Germany.

He tries to play at least fortnightly with his friends, but other than on the Persian weekend (Thursday and Friday) the club is deserted, he says, remarking that few Iranians know what golf is.

Kaykavos Saeedi is a 53-year-old civil servant tasked with waking Iranians up to the game's potential.

"Golf can be for everyone but we are something of a poor relation," says Saeedi, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran Golf Federation.

Iran's international sporting success is in wrestling, football, volleyball and basketball. As such, golf is considered a tough sell.

Saeedi admits he's no great shakes as a player but for 15 minutes he talks passionately about what his wish list would include: more courses, more driving ranges, more education and publicity about the game



Iranian golfer Milad Nazari competes during Iran's National Golf Tournament at Engelhab Sports Club in Tehran on November 9, 2014. Photo: AFP

in schools, and then - and only then - could more players ultimately be accommodated.

From a nationwide population of 78 million, only 3500 people - about 500 of them women - pick up a club, Saeedi says, so there would be little point in a sudden uptick in numbers unless more facilities are built.

The paucity of the sport is reflected in the federation's annual budget of US\$200,000 and the game in Iran

has a history that probably does not lend itself to expansion.

It arrived with the British early in the 20th century. When their oil executives were not busy trying to take control of Iran's southern fields, they liked to tee it up.

This elitism was magnified by

Iran's former royal rulers. The last shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, played golf and built the Tehran course in the grounds of what was then the Imperial Country Club.

Beyond the solitary grass course there are four sand courses across Iran.

As to talent, there are few shining hopes for Iranian glory but Hassan Karimian is the country's best.

A scratch player and captain of the national side, the 38-year-old has played in Asian Championships.

"When we go abroad to international events I've been asked, 'Do you have any courses in Iran?'" he says. "They're surprised when told we've only one standard grass course, which is not a very good one."

3500

Number of golfers in Iran

There are few youths coming into the game, Karimian says, while giving lessons at Engelhab's driving range, which despite being only 225 metres (738 feet) long is a good practice facility for the few who use it.

"Our players are usually over 30. It is rare to see 17- or 18-year-olds, but as a team we are making progress," he says, pointing to national championships and participation abroad.

"When the sports ministry notices this progress they will eventually pay attention. We need a vision to expand and make golf a known sport."

But getting people properly involved will be a tall order, says David Cherry, chair of the Asia Pacific Golf Confederation.

"The Iranian populace gets no exposure to the game as it is not on TV," says Cherry, who visited Tehran in January. He suggested schools are the route to follow.

"I tried to convince the ministers I saw that golf is not an elite sport and it can be played the whole of your life. I started at age five and am still playing 63 years later."

On a positive note, Iran is making the right noises by establishing good links with the APGC and golf's ruling body, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club (R&A) of St Andrews in Scotland.

"I sensed a deep-seated enthusiasm for the game but they are uncertain how to get to the next stage. It's difficult to see where children could get access to anywhere a golf ball could be hit," Cherry says.

Federation chief Saeedi has a tough job, but with his office dotted with golf memorabilia, as well as with portraits of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the late Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic, he will seek another five-year term later this year.

"We have problems but we have to concentrate on finding talent," he says. - AFP

FOOTBALL

FIFA must compensate, says German league boss

GERMAN Football League president Reinhard Rauball has criticised FIFA for insisting they will not compensate European clubs despite proposals to hold the 2022 World Cup in November and December.

Plans to play the 2022 tournament in Qatar in the middle of the European season still have to be ratified next month by FIFA's executive committee but the proposal has met widespread condemnation in Germany.

The FIFA proposal is based on common sense due to extreme temperatures in the Middle East state during June and July, when World Cup finals are traditionally held, but the date switch would cause major disruption to European competitions.

On February 24 Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, chair of the European Club Association, said he expected FIFA to compensate Europe's leagues and clubs for losing their top players at a key stage of the season, but FIFA general secretary Jerome Valcke has said there will be "no financial compensation given".

"I agree very much with Karl-Heinz Rummenigge that FIFA is obliged to pay compensation to those leagues clearly disadvantaged," said Rauball.

"The terse sentence I read this morning, that this is not an option, is unacceptable," said the 68-year-old German. "As far as I am concerned, it is an affront."

Rauball says he expects a long battle with FIFA and has already planned his campaign.

"We have to see that we build up a broad basis with other countries in Europe who are also affected," he said.

"Then you have to see who can be involved with this until the very end, as not everyone has a term in office until 2022." - AFP

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Sport

Iranian putters await golfing revolution

SPORT 66



CRICKET

Dancing, gunfire as Afghans celebrate cricket victory

HUNDREDS of jubilant Afghan cricket fans flooded onto the streets of major cities on February 26, dancing, waving flags and firing AK-47s in celebration at their team's historic World Cup win over Scotland.

Afghanistan, making their World Cup debut, secured a nail-biting one-wicket win over the Scots in Dunedin, chasing down the 211 target with just three balls to spare.

The Blue Tigers had slumped to 97-7, but a brilliant 96 by Samiullah Shenwari took the Afghans to the brink of a sensational victory.

In Kandahar, the southern city once famous as the Taliban heartland and now a bastion of cricket, ecstatic fans danced in the streets and fired off their weapons - a traditional Afghan gesture of celebration.

"After Afghanistan lost the seventh wicket, I smashed my phone in anger and cursed my team. Now they have won. I cannot believe it, but I am very happy," said cricket fan Abdul Samad.

Another supporter, Khalil Ahmad, said he feared the worst as the team's batsmen crumbled.

"I was watching the game from the very first ball. When Afghanistan



Afghan cricket fans in Jalalabad celebrate their national team's victory in their World Cup match against Scotland on February 26. Photo: AFP

'After Afghanistan lost the seventh wicket, I smashed my phone in anger and cursed my team.'

Abdul Samad
Cricket fan

lost its seven wickets, I was very disappointed. I thought 'that's it' and turned off the television," he said.

"Later, I saw Shenwari was playing really well, and I knew as long as he stayed in we had a chance of winning. Now I do not have any words to express my feelings."

There was more dancing and celebratory gunfire in the eastern city of Jalalabad, where university student Mirwais Rahman gave his classmates an unexpected surprise.

"I was in my class but was not

listening to the teacher. I had an earplug listening to the cricket on the radio," he said.

"When four balls remained and Shapoor hit the winning boundary I cried out in happiness."

In Kabul, groups of fans drove the city's streets waving flags and chanting slogans from car windows.

After the win, President Ashraf Ghani issued a statement extending congratulations to the Afghan cricketers and urged them to carry on their exploits in their next game.

Man-of-the-match Shenwari - who like many of the side learned cricket in a refugee camp in Pakistan - said the win was only an appetiser and the side were relishing the prospect of taking on the mighty Australia, joint World Cup hosts with New Zealand, in their next outing.

Afghan Cricket Board chair Nasimullah Danish congratulated the team for their victory, hailing their efforts keeping themselves calm under pressure. - AFP

Sports fest attracts nearly 4500 athletes

KYAW ZIN HLAING
kyawzinhlaing.mcm@gmail.com

THE 4th National Sports Festival came to a close in Nay Pyi Taw on February 28, concluding 16 days of competition that attracted athletes from across Myanmar.

The tournament - which was held at Wunna Theikdi Stadium, Zayyar Thiri Stadium and other venues around the city - boasted the participation of 2895 male athletes and 1466 female athletes from all state and regions. It encompassed competitions in 34 sporting disciplines, including seven for disabled athletes.

The festival provided the opportunity for up-and-coming competitors to vie for glory against veteran athletes.

Union Sports Minister U Tint Hsan said he hoped the tournament would help produce a new generation of top athletes.

"The other aim is to prepare for the 28th Southeast Asia Games. After this festival we will choose athletes for the SEA Games, with an emphasis on talent from the new generation," he said.

The 2015 SEA Games are scheduled to be held in Singapore from June 5 to 16.

Myanmar previously held National Sports Festivals in 1992, 1994 and 1997.

"The festival could not be held after 1997 because of the difficulty of organising the events," U Tint Hsan said. "This year we are restarting the tournament by holding it for the fourth time, and we will now try to hold it annually."



Martial artists vie for honours at the National Sports Festival in Nay Pyi Taw. Photo: Ministry of Sports

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