ICRC jail visits to resume in early 2013

Government has agreed to respect ICRC standards, says country rep

By Nan Tin Htwe and Tony Yoo

INTERNATIONAL Committee of the Red Cross expects to resume prison visits in early 2013, its representative in Myanmar said last week, after a gap of more than seven years.

“We are talking with the Ministry of Home Affairs about organising the resumption of the visits. The government made [a] public statement it will resume, to some disputes over how the elections were conducted,” he said.

“Basically, we are in the process of working out with Ministry of Home Affairs how we are going to do it,” ICRC resident representative Mr Georges Paclisanu told The Myanmar Times on December 17.

“What is clear is government has agreed to respect ICRC standards, which are applied worldwide,” he said.

He said ICRC would work with prisoners and prison authorities and avoid political issues.

“Our main focus is to [judge] whether a man or woman is rightfully in prison ... Our focus is to see that the spirit of international laws respected,” Mr Paclisanu said.

“We cannot pass judgement on political issues – whether the country is going in the right direction or not. But from the standpoint of our work it is very good. It’s a fact that three years ago we cannot go into prison. Now we have received the clearance. One a political person would not recognise that. We are happy with the step that has been taken by the government in regards of our access to prisons,” he said.

Myingyan officials under fire over ward voting

By Si Thu Lwin

TOWNSHIP officials in Mandalay Region’s Myingyan township are under pressure to re-hold elections for some ward administrator posts in the township after residents complained of interference and a lack of transparency.

Residents in Myingyan’s 20 wards showed much more enthusiasm for the vote than in Mandalay, with candidates even conducting campaigns to win votes from their neighbours, observers said.

But the excitement also led to some disputes over how the elections were conducted, with complaints emerging from seven wards, residents told The Myanmar Times last week.

“The representatives for groups of 10 households (seh eain mu) carried out the election correctly at the beginning, but then they didn’t show the number of votes at the end. They also said there were invalid ballots but they refused to show the ballots. So it was not a fair process,” said U Aung Than, one of the candidates for ward administrator in No 9 ward.

“So we put a petition with signatures from 24 seh eain mu to the township general administration office and they said they will hold the election again,” he said.

Meanwhile, township administrators were forced to halt the election in No 1 ward because participants complained that the five-member supervisory team established to oversee the election had tried to influence the result.

“The supervisory team asked residents to select the seh eain mu that they wanted, not the ones that the government had designated to hold the election again,” he said.

The ICRC was forced to suspend prison visits in 2005 because participants complained that the five-member supervisory team established to oversee the election had tried to influence the result.

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By Tim McLaughlin

**OFFICIALS** in Nay Pyi Taw are understandably eager to showcase Myanmar’s often-criticised capital, known for its inaccessibility and grandiose monuments to the military.

The hostbook of the SEA Games, the opening and closing ceremonies, will take place in Nay Pyi Taw. Organisers have traditionally used the ceremonies to emphasise national unity.

The Nay Pyi Taw football stadium is the venue nearest to completion; Deputy Minister for Sport U Thaung Htike said he is confident that all will be completed by December 31. The two other venues in the complex are to be put a firm figure on the budget because responsibilities are shared between 17 sub-committees.

When The Myanmar Times contacted the Ministry of Finance and Revenue last week, both a budget director and an assistant director declined to comment. They directed inquiries back to the Ministry of Sports.

Calls to Max Myanmar’s Yangon headquarters were redirected to Nay Pyi Taw. Representatives from the company there also declined comment.

The lack of financial transparency over the games is a potential cause for concern, particularly given the country’s budget deficit and the pressure on the government to increase social spending.

Recent SEA Games have been plagued by overspending and budgeted amounts that have strained the finances of regional and national governments. When Indonesia staged the games in 2011, the budget ballooned out to a reported 3 trillion rupiah (US$319 million).

Singapore, which will host the SEA Games in 2015, after Myanmar, has already pledged to keep a tight rein on games-related spending.

“Sixty million people will suffer the adverse effects of this debt,” said U Aye Lwin Aung said that the income of 26 out of every 100 people is under K340 billion (US$400 million) in spending and would consider allocating more money if requested.

“In my opinion, we have already allocated enough money to the SEA Games … but if further funding is needed, the hluttaw will also sanction it. The necessary funds were given to provide athletes with facilities to raise their spirits,” U Aye Mauk said, adding that it was important the government “makes optimum use of the money”.

The hluttaw has already slashed funding for some proposed venues in Pyin Oo Lwin and Yamethin and U Thein Nyunt of Thangyangun said that while the games are “very important” the country could not afford to burden itself with debt for the sake of a sporting competition.

“Because the country is poor … we should (host the games) in the right fashion. We should not forget that the income of 26 out of every 100 citizens is below US$1 a day,” he said.

“Sixty million people will suffer the adverse effects of this debt. Therefore, long-term management is needed to ensure we get the most from the money spent,” he said.

“For example, after the event we should consider using buildings that will be used to accommodate athletes to look after people who are facing housing difficulties.”
Company looking to compromise, say miners

By Pyae Thet Phyo

PROTESTING miners from Yamethin township are confident of reaching a settlement soon with Myanmar National Prosperity Company, a leader of the group said last week.

The 76 miners from the Mohtoi Moenzi region were seeking K2 billion (about US$2.4 million) from the company, which had offered only K500,000 to K1 million to each person. However, during a meeting at the office of Mining Enterprise 2 in Yamethin township last week, the company promised to review its offer and indicated it wanted to reach a settlement, said Ko Aung Yi.

“We discussed it for two days, on December 17 and 18. It came to our knowledge that [Myanmar National Prosperity] will form a panel and decide on a settlement,” he said.

“We are making the demands for 76 people. It took from six months to one year to dig and discover gold and a large sum of money has been invested. So our demand is fair.”

The dispute was erupted in June, when the miners alleged Myanmar National Prosperity violated the terms of an agreement it reached with people who were already mining in the area. The agreement, signed in September 2011, said that the company would form a joint venture with miners already working in the area.

U Set Aung said the zone will create employment for Myanmar and Japan through the development of the Thilawa SEZ, one of the three zones under construction in Myanmar. Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Set Aung said at the signing ceremony in Yangon on December 21.

“The special economic zones are going to contribute towards economic and social development in the country. There are going to be many benefits and some of these benefits will include enormous employment opportunities at every level of society,” he said.

The Thilawa SEZ is in Yangon Region’s Thanlyin township. Under the agreement, work will begin on the 6,000-acre project next year. A port and industrial park will be operating in 2015, Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry said.

Tokyo has already written off massive debts owed by Myanmar and Japanese media last month.

“We have to find an equal balance in terms of development. The three pillars of sustainable development are economic, social and environmental. We have to take all three into serious consideration,” he added.

“We will do so through the implementation of the MoU in the Thilawa SEZ. The MoU not only signifies our economic cooperation with Japan, but also the friendship between our two countries. U Set Aung said the project would be successful if Myanmar and Japan concentrate on sustainable development and invite as many businesses as possible.

“We will make the Thilawa SEZ project the SEZs require us to develop new technologies and are a proper mechanism to lead the country towards economic reform and accelerate our development,” he said.

The Obama administration, seeking a strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific, is keen to expand its influence in a country where China has had almost unchallenged dominance.

Officials said in October that the United States was willing to allow Myanmar to participate as an observer in joint military exercises in Thailand in 2013, an event that includes military teams from the US and Asian allies.

Senior US military officers and civilian defence officials were part of a US government delegation that held talks in Myanmar in October, opening the door to a defence dialogue. – AFP
Ward administrator selection process prompts complaints

By Kyaw Hau Mon

POLITICIANS and residents have reported administrative problems and cheating in elections for ward and village-tract administrators, which are being held throughout the country this month.

The problems, mostly between organising commissions and residents, have emerged in Yangon, Mandalay and some rural townships. Under the Ward and Village-tract Administrator Law, residents are grouped together into 10-household units. The leaders of the 10 household select a representative, known as seh eain su, for their group through secret ballot and the seh eain su in the ward or villa-

t tract then select a ward or village-

tract administrator. The term of the post is concurrent to the Pyithu Hluttaw.

While some cases of cheating have been reported, Dr Nyo Nyo Thin, a Yangon Region Hluttaw representative from Bahan township, said the main issue was poor record-keeping, which also plagued the April 1

by-elections.

She said in Bahan township the leaders of the ward commissions were given only three to five days to organise lists of residents.

“The main problem is the lack of time for the ward commissions to get the real information about the total number of residents in their area. Many residents are living with temporary family registration documents so they are not eligible to be a seh eain su candidate,” she said.

Those who were not included on the list of ward residents had to file a request to the five-

member committee overseeing the elections to be added in time for the vote.

U Myoint Oo, 65, from ward 45 in Yangon’s North Dagon township said: “My ward administration and Development Party member in his award had tried to take the seh eain su administrator position without a vote.

‘After we found out about it, we did not accept him (in the vote for the ward administrator). The ward elections are the foundation of the democratic system, we should all recognise the importance of this process,' U Myoint Oo said.

People familiar with the process said that not all wards used the secret ballot to select the seh eain su representatives and ward administrators. In many cases, it depended on the level of interest from residents: while some elected the chance to select their administrator through a vote, many have shown little interest.

“In Bahan township, many people have been very active to choose quota officials and this is a positive sign for the development of the democratic process. Those low-level elections are the very basis for democracy so I am very glad to see that people are making the effort to vote,” Dr Nyo Nyo Thin said.

“But more time should have been given to collect the updated list of the number of residents in the wards,” she said.

Myint Oo editor Ko Myo Thant said people were still not familiar with the new system of selecting administrators and the election results had not been properly publicised.

“There is also very little time for quota officials to take the lists of residents. Another thing is people should know what are the rights and responsibilities of the quota administrator so they can choose the right person,” he said.

“We need to take time to practice this law so that the right people get the jobs and the administration. The main weakness is that because of the short timeframe most people do not understand the new law clearly.”

U Ba Myint, a member of the election organising committee for Myanamge’s No 6 ward, said all administrators had to be chosen by December 25.

“We have to submit the final lists of the quota administrator for the township’s office on December 25 and then they will submit them again to the district level. We used the secret voting system in our ward,” he said.

‘Here, some USDP and NLD members are in the list but they are not represented in their party, just standing as individuals. If they are selected to be the ward administrator they have to quit from their parties for this period, after that they can do as they want.'
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- OVER 100 YEARS - OVER 100 COUNTRIES - MILLIONS OF USERS - WORKS WHEREVER IT HURTS.
CONDUCTING a census in Myanmar is not optional and challenges will be tackled head on through international cooperation, a senior United Nations official told The Myanmar Times in Yangon last week.

“There’s a dire need to conduct a census in Myanmar in a timely manner,” said Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad, the United Nations Population Fund’s (UNFPA) representative in Myanmar, said on December 19. “After 30 years of not counting the population, the census has become an imperative.”

The most recent official census in Myanmar took place in 1983, when regional conflicts rendered parts of the country inaccessible. Since then, population statistics have been based largely on estimates and projections and vary substantially.

“This data is crucial to the development and monitoring of national plans. [A census] provides up-to-date and accurate data about the size, distribution and characteristics of the population and its dynamics such as migration, urbanisation and ageing,” Mr Abdel-Ahad said.

A government official at the launch. Pic: Supplied/UNFPA

A PROJ ECT to conduct a census of population and housing next year was launched in an event held jointly by the Ministry of Immigration and Population and the United Nations Population Fund in Yangon on December 14.

The census, which will be the first in Myanmar in 30 years and is expected to cost nearly US$60 million, comes at a critical time for the country as it embarks on political and economic reform, said a press release issued by the UNFPA to mark the event.

“A census will provide a voice to the country’s remarkable ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, and plan and deliver services, in particular to the poorest and most vulnerable,” Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad, the UNFPA’s representative in Myanmar, said. “We don’t want the census data to be the first step toward political violence. It will help us give voice to the people’s concerns and needs.”

The Department of Population has been preparing for the census since earlier this year through activities such as designing a questionnaire, developing a communication and publicity plan and setting up the information technology infrastructure, the press release said.

A questionnaire with 41 questions will be available for public review when the pilot census is conducted next year in 20 townships throughout the country, including areas affected by conflict, such as Kachin and Rakhine states.

A lawyer and human rights activist, Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad, said the agency would provide technical support and help to ensure that the census adheres to international standards in census taking and assist the government in resource mobilisation.

““We are very aware that there would be some challenges in undertaking a census,” Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad said, adding that this was a standard focus in any census.

The estimated cost of the census is US$58.5 million, of which only $20 million has been pledged.

The success of the census will hinge upon the mutual commitment of the government and international development partners,” Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad said.

Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad emphasised that census data would not be used for voter registration.

The Union Election Commission is responsible for the establishment of voter registration, said Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad. “We don’t want the census to be politicised.”

One obstacle for UNFPA is how to effectively engage ethnic minority communities in the census, especially those living in conflict-prone areas.

“The census is likely to benefit Myanmar’s election in 2015. Data on population breakdown by sex, age and location will help determine the best locations and the best places for polling stations as well as gauge voter turnout,” Mr Mohamed Abdel-Ahad said.

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Glad to see the census is going ahead, says mediator

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No end in sight to conflict in Kachin State, says mediator

YANGON - A year after Myanmar’s president ordered a halt to military offensives against ethnic minority rebels, fighting rages on in the northern state where peace talks Flounder, a mediator said last week.

“Fighting between the Kachin (Kachin Independence Organisation) and the Myanmar military has been happening every day in recent weeks,” said Yaw Zaw Hkauk, a businessman and peace negotiator between the KIO and the government.

“People are losing their homes and land as they have to flee the fighting,” Yaw Zaw Hkauk said. “Fighting is happening every day near villages.”

Several rounds of talks aimed at resolving the conflict in the country’s far north have shown little tangible progress. The KIO is calling for greater political rights and an end to alleged human rights abuses by the army.

The KIO said it’s impossible to have a meeting about the peace process at the moment although the dialogue can be continued later.” Yaw Zaw Hkauk said.

A member of the KIO’s armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), said the rebels had come under attack by military helicopters near their base of Laiza close to the Chinese border, although it was not possible to verify the claim.

He said both sides were concentrating on the need for another round of talks after the most recent meeting in October, but no date or place had yet been decided. There was no immediate comment from the authorities.

“We don’t have a real commitment,” the KIA member said. “We ask for political negotiations, but they don’t mention political dialogue. They just want a ceasefire. So it is a huge problem to find a solution.” – AFP
Kickboxing fans prepare for pint-sized bout at Dagon semis

By Sein Heavy

PANS at this weekend’s Dagon Golden Pennant Myanmar traditional boxing semi-final will be treated to an unusual curtain-raiser: a bout between dwarves.

The 106.7-centimetre Tapaw, 29, from Hlaingbwe in Kayin State will pit Pho Kay against Thailand’s Phankummat in the first division. In the second division, Tu Tu will take on Tha Pyay Nyo and Phothagyai will face off against Lone Chay Lwin.

DragonAir to launch Hong Kong flights on Jan 9, MAI to follow

By Zaw Win Thaw

BUDGET carrier DragonAir will begin offering flights this week between Hong Kong and Yangon on January 9, the company said last week.

The new service will target both leisure and business travellers, the airline said.

DragonAir chief executive officer Mr Patrick Yeung said the airline had chosen Yangon as its first destination in Myanmar because it is the centre of most of the country’s commercial activity and is an important business and communications hub.

“Yangon is an important addition to DragonAir’s expanding network in Asia and launching this new destination will further strengthen Hong Kong’s position as a leading aviation hub. We see tremendous potential in this market with both tourism and commercial activities rapidly gaining momentum. We look forward to carrying more passengers between Hong Kong and Myanmar and helping to promote ties between the two places,” Mr Yeung said.

The airline will use Airbus A321 aircraft on the route and flights will depart Hong Kong every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

However, DragonAir will not have the route to itself for long: national carrier Myanmar Airways International also plans to launch a Yangon-Hong Kong direct route to itself for long: national carrier Myanmar Airways.

While MAI had said flights would begin by the end of 2012, marketing executive Daw Aye Mra Tha told The Myanmar Times last week that the airline was still preparing for the launch. She said discussions with authorities from Hong Kong are continuing and flights would begin “very soon”.

‘Lean and mean’ new airline shocks rivals with cut-price fares

Golden Myanmar Airlines to offer Yangon-Mandalay flights for just K27,000 when it launches in January

By Yu Yu Maw

THE domestic air market is set for a dramatic shakeup, with a new entrant planning to offer one-way fares to Mandalay for as low as K27,000 from January.

Golden Myanmar Airlines, a public company established in August, will begin flights on January 9, said Daw Kay Kalayar Aung, the airline’s public relations manager.

The five private domestic airlines charge about K80,000 for locals on the route and US$130 for foreigners but Daw Kay Kalayar Aung said Golden Myanmar could offer fares for substantially less because it used a low-cost model.

“Our airfares are very cheap because we are low-cost carrier, not a legacy airline. Our cost in K27,000 because our organisation structure is lean and mean, with no frills at all. Our management assigns us all to multiple tasks. Most of the cheap fare seats are in advance sales, the rest of our seats will be close to the average fare but we can definitely say we have no expensive seats,” she said.

Daw Kay Kalayar Aung said the K27,000 fare was not promotional and would be offered regularly.

“The other airlines have to welcome GMA because we are going to enhance the market demand. We are going to allow everybody to be able to fly. … We are not looking for a niche market. We are a cost carrier, not a legacy airline,” she added.

Golden Myanmar Airlines was formed by 15 major investors, including U Khin Maung Aye of CB Bank and Kaung Maung Aung Group and U Thein Tun of Myanmar Golden Star. It sells shares to the public for K10,000 each and also has an employee share scheme.

The airline will launch in January with two Airbus A320s and plans to add a new aircraft to its fleet every six months, Daw Kay Kalayar Aung said.

“Due to the market demand we shall extend our routes not only through the Asia region but also to the Middle East, Europe, Japan, Korea, and Australia – even to the United States. We hope we can do that over the next few years.”

The head of one travel company said he welcomed the introduction of pricing competition on domestic routes and he hoped to see more low-cost airlines established in future.

“The flight takes approximately one hour and 15 minutes for Yangon to Mandalay so we can easily get by without food. Most airlines don’t mind using low-cost carriers,” U Tint Naung, managing director of travel company Golden Express.

‘Golden Myanmar will fly the Yangon-Mandalay route nine times a week using an Airbus A320 with 180 economy-class seats. Passengers will be required to buy food and pay for baggage over a 10-kilogram limit.

The spokesperson from a rival domestic airline said the cheap fares had sent shockwaves through the industry, as the existing airlines all set the same prices. However, he ruled out reducing prices to compete with Golden Myanmar Airlines.

“I think the airline can’t afford to keep offering one-way fares of K27,000 in the long-term. Fuel prices are too high for that. We won’t reduce our airfares to those levels,” he said.

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SNPD pushes Shan party merger

Concerns that parties will split Shan vote in 2015 election, opening the way for an NLD or USDP victory

SHAN Nationalities Democratic Party leaders say they are opening a merger with a rival Shan party before the 2015 election to better compete against the National League for Democracy and Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Speaking ahead of his party’s national convention in Tachileik on January 2-4, SNPD vice chairman U Sai Hsaung Hsi said a merger with the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy was in the interests of the Shan people.

“There are likely to be two Shan parties in Shan State for the 2015 election and if these two merge into one, they will be stronger. They can have enough strength to compete against the two giant parties,” he told The Myanmar Times last week.

The SNLD, which contested the 1990 election, was deregistered in 2010 but re-registered earlier this year after its leader, U Khun Htun Oo, was released from prison in January. The SNLD was formed by former SNLD members to compete in the 2010 election, in which it won more than 50 seats at the national and state levels.

“Without their involvement we cannot say it is an all-inclusive peace process – we need to arrange their participation,” he said.

U Khun Htun Oo said representatives from about 33 different ethnic political parties and more than 10 non-state armed groups in Shan State would also be invited.

“All ethnic groups in Shan State want real peace, including Wa and Kokang. The focus of this seminar will just be to establish the White Tiger (SNPD) party. Many former SNLD members joined us,” said U Sai Hsaung Hsi, the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Kyaukme.

However, U Sai Hsaung Hsi, who won a seat for the SNLD in the 1990 election, said he was unhappy at comments U Khun Htun Oo made in the United States in September in which he said the SNDP was “soft” in its dealings with the government.

He said his party’s representatives had regularly called in the hluttaw for U Khun Htun Oo’s release and the SNLD had even offered to let him run as its candidate in Lashio in the April 1 by-elections.

U Khun Htun Oo’s comments that the SNLD could not merge with the SNLD “is basically like throwing sand in our eyes. He accused us of being soft because he didn’t know our activities. While he might not know what we are doing, the people do. Though we want to merge, what he has said hinders it,” he said.

“All the people will be delighted if a single party is formed putting aside grudges and focusing on the interests of our people in the way a politician should. We hope that he will change his mind after consulting his central executive committee members ... our party is not the reason why there are two Shan parties in Shan State.”

As part of the SNPD’s efforts to expand its support in Shan State, the party will hold its convention in the eastern Shan State town of Tachileik next week. U Sai Hsaung Hsi said residents and parliamentarians from the eastern bank of the Thanlwin River had requested the convention be held in their region.

“Last year it was held in Taunggyi, where our headquarters is. The people have accepted the party’s activities and trust us more and more. We shifted the venue for the convention to Tachileik because our campaign has gathered momentum and the local people requested us to do so. The convention will show the people how energetic and united we are,” he said. “Adding that the party is likely to increase its number of deputy leaders and local committee members at the convention.”

But the 2015 election remains a concern for the party, particularly the prospect of the Shan vote being split between the SNDP and SNLD.

“Unless we overcome the challenge of merging these Shan parties ... we can’t predict what will happen in terms of the 2015 election. I would say 90pc of people in the state want a merger to happen. Merging is the only way that both parties put aside their personal vanities and work for the state and serving the interests of all ethnic peoples and the Shan state,” he said.

U Ye Tun said the situation was also further complicated by the fact that the political organisational structures of some non-state armed groups could also enter the political fray if peace negotiations progress well.

“Without their involvement we cannot say it is an all-inclusive peace process – we need to arrange their participation,” he said.

U Sai Hsaung Hsi said the transition would also be complicated by the fact that the political organisational structures of some non-state armed groups could also enter the political fray if peace negotiations progress well.

“The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy plans to hold a peace seminar in the Shan State capital Taunggyi in April aimed at furthering the peace process for all Shan State residents.”

THE Shan Nationalities League for Democracy plans to hold a peace seminar in the Shan State capital Taunggyi in April aimed at furthering the peace process for all Shan State residents.

“The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy wishes to extend our invitation to all political organisations of our armed groups that have not established a political organ to join us and participate. The Shan State Army-South, Shan State Progress Party, Restoration Council of Shan State and Shan non-government organisations took part in the Yangon seminar, which was organised by the SNLD.”

“There are about 33 different ethnic groups living in Shan State and we will encourage them to participate in this seminar,” he said.

“Without their involvement we cannot say it is an all-inclusive peace process – we need to arrange their participation.”

U Khun Htun Oo said representatives from about 15 ethnic political parties and more than 10 non-state armed groups in Shan State would also be invited.

“All ethnic groups in Shan State want real peace, including Wa and Kokang. The focus of this seminar will just be to establish the White Tiger (SNPD) party. Many former SNLD members joined us,” said U Sai Hsaung Hsi, the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Kyaukme.

However, U Sai Hsaung Hsi, who won a seat for the SNLD in the 1990 election, said he was unhappy at comments U Khun Htun Oo made in the United States in September in which he said the SNDP was “soft” in its dealings with the government.

He said his party’s representatives had regularly called in the hluttaw for U Khun Htun Oo’s release and the SNLD had even offered to let him run as its candidate in Lashio in the April 1 by-elections.

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Mandalay cemetery chief denies report of girl’s death

AN OFFICIAL from Mandalay’s main cemetery has rejected a news report about a young woman who was incorrectly pronounced dead and almost cremated before her mother discovered she was still alive.

Monywa Times published the article on its Facebook page on December 20 and requested readers to help the family, saying residents in their village did not want the young woman to return home because of superstitious beliefs.

“There was no such case here of a dead girl who came back to life. It is just a fake story. Before conducting any cremation we ask for official documents showing they are deceased,” U Min Min, the in-charge at Kyar Ni Ran cemetery in Madaya township, said on December 20.

The report said the young woman was a university student. Her mother realised she was alive when she went to kiss her before she was to be cremated and noticed she was still breathing, the report said. – Phyo Wai Kyaw and Si Thu Lwin
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Confusion over migrant deadline

By Bill O’Toole

GOVERNMENT officials will meet their counterparts from the Thai Department of Labour this week to discuss changes to Thailand policy on migrant workers amid conflicting reports over the country’s worker registration program.

The Thai Department of Labour had insisted that December 14 would be the final date for undocumented migrant workers in Thailand to register for work permits and avoid possible deportation. The closure of five migrant processing centres in Thailand would have left the country’s estimated 1.5 million illegal workers with no means of registering for the National Verification program, under which they are issued with a temporary passport. So far more than one million workers have applied for the scheme.

However, sources said the program has not yet been halted and the Thai government’s policy on migrant workers was still very much in flux.

State media in Myanmar reported on December 19 that Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra had agreed to a proposal from President U Thein Sein to extend the deadline another three months during their joint visit to the Dawei deep sea port project on December 17.

Mr A N u s o r n Kraiwatnussorn, vice-minister for labour and social welfare in Bangkok, confirmed that President U Thein Sein had made the request but said that any proposed changes must be voted on by the Thai cabinet and no decisions would be made until the next meeting.

“Right now we are just working through the process,” he said by phone from Bangkok. “Right now we are working with the old system (of registration), but after the meeting we will have a new system.”

Mr Andy Hall, an expert on migrant rights groups and head of the Migrant Justice Network, said the Thai government had already agreed to push back the deadline.

He added that Director General U Myo Aung is in Bangkok negotiating with his counterparts in the Thai government.

Migrant rights groups were last week critical of the Thai government’s lack of clarity over its migrant worker policy.

Mr Siem Huy, an advisor to the Migrant Worker’s Rights Network, said the lack of an official statement or policy from the Thai government made life more difficult for the more than one million illegal migrant workers living in Thailand.

“The workers are stressed, they’re scared,” he said. “They’re uncertain about the future.”

Mr Hall agreed with this assessment, adding: “This chaos is a clear indication that the Thais have no [legal] standard for immigration.”

Women’s group calls for more reps in hluttaw

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

CHIANG Mai-based Women’s League of Burma has called for greater women’s participation in the peace process and politics.

The group’s leaders said last week they want to see at least 30pc of seats in parliament reserved for women.

“We encourage greater female participation in the decision-making process. We have to push for at least 30pc of seats in the hluttaw for women,” general secretary Daw Tin Tin Nyo said at a press conference in Yangon on December 18.

The press conference was held on the last day of an eight-day visit by the organisations’s leaders to the Thai-Thai border as they met officials from the Myanmar Peace Centre, political parties, women’s organisations and other civil society groups, as well as women MPs. During the meetings they discussed the political situation and exchanged views on the role of women in the peace process.

“We are satisfied with our discussions. All are willing to cooperate to include more women in their activities, particularly politicians. They want to get more women members in their parties and they want us to train them about politics. With this support we can implement our activities to get more women in the parliament,” Daw Tin Tin Nyo said.

Apart from its advocacy work, the group has also written an alternative constitution aimed at encouraging the development of a “real democratic state” and achieving “genuine peace”.

“Our constitution is designed to point out weaknesses in the current constitution and the need to amend some points. In our constitution, we put points about the rights of women, so that they get at least 30pc of seats in parliament,” said joint secretary Saw San Nyein Thu.

“We plan to conduct awareness programs for women in Myanmar by cooperating with political parties and other associations so that we can achieve our vision,” she said.

Women’s League of Burma was established in 1999 as a platform for the women of Myanmar to push for political change and work for gender equality.

The group’s representatives met Minister for the President’s Office U Aung Min twice in 2011 to discuss political issues and the peace process.

But Daw Tin Tin Nyo said the group does not want to officially relocate inside Myanmar.
NGO pledges more media support

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

DENMARK-BASED non-profit International Media Support will continue to support the development of Myanmar’s media industry in 2013, an official told The Myanmar Times in Copenhagen earlier this month.

IMS project manager for Myanmar Eunice Harboe said the organisation’s future programs will build on the work it has done in Myanmar since 2006 and would be driven by what support journalists in the country feel is most needed.

Mr Harboe said more training was needed to ensure journalists could make the most of the freer media environment and IMS plans to work across many areas, including legal advice, public service media, education and access to the media in ethnic minority areas.

IMS provides training and other support through the Ministry of Information and media organisations, such as the Myanmar Journalists Association and Myanmar Journalist Network.

For more than a decade it has also been a supporter of exile media, including Mizima, The Irrawaddy and Democratic Voice of Burma and Mr Harboe said IMS was committed to working with both the print and public sectors.

“We’ve no secrets [about] working inside [Myanmar],” Mr Harboe said. “We’re supporting journalists in the country, and Mr Harboe said IMS was committed to working with both the print and public sectors.”

“We’ve invited officials from the Myanmar Information Ministry to learn [about] international media this year,” he said.

In mid-2012, IMS was one of the supporters of the Conference on Media Development in Myanmar, which was organised by the Ministry of Information and Culture and UNESCO.

Established in 2001, IMS is a non-profit organisation that works to support local media in more than 50 countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition. It helps to strengthen professional journalism and ensure that media can operate in challenging circumstances.

WHO findings to help fight malaria drug resistance

By Tony Yoo

A TEAM of scientists co-ordinated by the WHO has launched an “in-depth research” into drug-resistant malaria in Myanmar, as the organisation also reported that funds to help fight the disease had slowed in the past two years.

Scientists from the University of Maryland in the United States, working as a part of the WHO team, identified molecular markers that could assist in tracking the spread of drug-resistant malaria in Myanmar.

“This emerging form of artemisinin-resistant malaria, while it’s still relatively rare, is already causing treatment failures where it first appeared, in Cambodia,” said Dr Plowe, the principal investigator, in a statement issued by the University of Maryland.

Artemisinin is a major component in the current treatment of malaria patients.

“The concern is that we’ll lose this drug, at an immense cost of human life,” Dr Plowe said.

The scientists have received US federal funding to use the new knowledge to screen within Myanmar to identify drug-resistant incidences, and train Myanmar investigators in the latest laboratory technology.

“Artemisinin has been used for more than 30 years,” Dr Plowe said.

Dr Plowe warned that drug-resistant malaria could bring devastating consequences for Myanmar and other countries.

In addition to a loss of human life, if we lose this most important tool against malaria, the recent momentum for global malaria eradication could quickly evaporate. It takes a long time to develop a drug, and we have nothing on the shelf to replace this class of drugs,” the report said.

Artemisinin is the leading drug for malaria treatment but resistance has been detected in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, the WHO says. It is thought that a major factor is the high cost of artemisinin, which is now fallen by more than half, from 145 million to just 66 million.

The finding was published in The World Malaria Report 2012, released by the organisation on December 17.

WHO cited the example of bed-netting insecticidal nets (LLINs), saying that the cost of producing them has decreased in endemic sub-Saharan African countries between 2005 and 2010 by more than half, from 145 million to just 66 million.

The nets are considered a vital frontline preventative measure against malaria. "This means that public health households will be unable to replace existing bed nets when required, exposing more people to the potentially deadly disease," the report said.

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Men read a newspaper in Yangon on April 2. Pic: AFP

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Myanmar travel buzz builds for 2013

By Tony Yoo

UNITED States President Barack Obama’s historic visit last month has brought priceless publicity for the tourism industry, with the country recently named on several “must go” travel destination lists for 2013.

“President Obama’s historic recent visit to Myanmar – the first visit by a sitting US president – is adding to already heated-up interest in the country,” Associated Press said in its 2013 travel list last week.

The website of travel guide publisher Fodor’s also credited President Obama’s trip with putting Myanmar back onto the international tourism radar.

“Obama confirmed the country’s isolation, headline-making visits by the mirage of success” and “Obama's visit to Myanmar last month was hailed a historic visit: arrivals January and October were up an astounding 50pc on the same period last year, the Ministry for Hotels and Tourism announced last month.”

President for Hotels and Tourism U Kyaw Aung told the Bangkok Post last week that the country expects to welcome one million people in the calendar year.

However, there are well-founded concerns about how will be possible with the continued influx of tourists.

“We need to upgrade service standards, transportation and also upgrade existing hotels and tourism sites including opening new tourist sites,” the minister told the Bangkok Post.

Myanmar travel buzz builds for 2013

Top tourist destinations like Bagan are expected to receive more foreign visitors in 2013. Pic: Supplied

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By Yu Yu Maw

THC Ministry of Immigration plans to expand a visa-on-arrival program to citizens of 22 European countries, a government official said last week.

“We can’t say exactly which countries and when it will start. The types of visas made available will be the same as the visa-on-arrival that’s been in 29 countries,” said U Zaw Win Myint, assistant director of the Immigration and Population Department.

A limited visa on arrival system was introduced on June 1 for business and conference visitors from 22 countries, while citizens of Macau and Hong Kong became eligible for the program in August.

However, fewer than 5 percent of visitors use the program, according to government statistics. We are offering it to citizens of 29 countries, said U Zaw Win Myint, assistant director of the Immigration and Population Department.

By Su Hlaing Tun

FARMERS can fight land grabs – and now the law is on their side, say activists and experts. They say all they have to do now is publicise the law.

Widespread ignorance of their rights under the Farmers Land Law and Vincent, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law means that farmers are losing their land or failing to receive proper compensation, said U Nay Myo Wai, chairman of the Myanmar Farmers and Displaced Workers Party. He was speaking at a national workshop on land tenure and land use rights held in Nay Pyi Taw last month.

“We like and support almost the entire law. However, it needs to be published so the public knows about it,” he said.

“This problem crops up throughout the country. Because farmers don’t know they can defend their land using laws such as La Na 39 and sections such as 4.5 and 10; they cannot resolve their land problems,” said U Nay Myo Wai.

The minister who attended the workshop said an enforcement education effort should be stepped up. The government is also making more efforts to consult residents before acquiring land for projects.

“A different administrative approach is being used so when carrying out projects not only is the approval of local authorities needed but also the consent of the public,” said Minister for the President’s Office U Tin Naing Tin.

Stressing the break with past practice, he added: “We were wrong in the past. Now we are trying to make the system as effective as possible. Now we want to listen to your voice. Only then can we make the right choice for the people.”

He also said more thought could be given to introducing stiffer penalties for corruption.

“Punishments should be appropriate, so as to deter offenders,” he said.

Ward and village administrators, land record departments and legal groups will be expected to play their part in the public education process.

“If the public are aware of legal procedures, it will make it easier to play their part,” said U Kyaw Nyein Aung, managing director of the Land Record and Land Records Department.

One workshop participant said: “Before, everything was done to stop the public participating. Local administrative bodies wanted to make themselves look good at the expense of local citizens. Now everybody should cooperate to cure the national disease of corruption.”

Translated by Tha Thwin
A BUDDHIST monk in North Okkalapa township has resumed offering accommodation and healthcare services for people living with HIV/AIDS at his monastery after the government rescinded a ban on such activities.

The venerable Badhanta Kundala of Ah Thawkayama Shwe Hninhar Yaesl monastery said he is caring for more than 70 people with HIV, including women and children, at the monastery through the recently established Aye Mya Garuna foundation.

“I was so sad when a doctor shouted at me ‘you HIV’ when I inquired about getting treatment for my husband,” she said. “I did not know about the disease because we were living in very small village far from town. Many women have similar stories to mine.”

Aye Mya Garuna member U Min Thein Tun said the foundation was formed so that activities at the monastery could be carried out officially. An application to register the foundation formally is being processed but the government allowed activities to resume in June.

“Tun said the foundation was formed so that the activities at the monastery could be carried out officially. An application to register the foundation formally is being processed but the government allowed activities to resume in June.”

The achievement caps a prolific career for the 85-year-old U Win Maung, who also won a National Literary Award for a collection of poems titled Water Fetching Time in 1972 and a Sarpay Beikman translation award in 1994 for Aesop’s Fables, which was written with his wife Ngwe Ta Yi.

His works have been or are being translated into English, German, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese and Serbian. U Win Maung also received the Natyaykan Shwessaung award in 2005, a religious literary award in 2006 and Thuta Swessaung award for lifetime achievement in 2011.

The author said his passion for writing kept him healthy.

“I always bear in mind that I must be healthy and live a long time because I want to keep writing. I will write for the rest of my life, until my last breath. I envy those who died while they were writing, like Saya Tot Toe,” U Win Maung said. – Translated by Thit Lwin
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**Dawei backers court Japanese investors**

**By Yhoon Hnin**

A MUSIC festival organised by the National League for Democracy will be held at People’s Park this week to raise money for the party’s education activities.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will open the Dawei Deep Sea Port and Special Economic Zone on December 17 and five bands will performed with 43 famous singers. Another 36 singers will perform the following night.

Tickets can be bought at the NLD head office on Shwegoneidaing Road, other outlets and at the gate.

Sky Net will broadcast the concert live over two nights.

The education network helps poor students with free education, accommodation and the support of public. At the moment, Myanmar’s education system has fallen behind and to improve the quality of education we need the public to show their support,” party patron U Tin Oo said.

Meanwhile, a number of private companies announced they would donate education network. Media organisations Sky Net and Shwe FM donated K130 million, Air Bagan and Asia Development Bank donated K70 million and Myanmar Distribution Group K10 million.

**Artists join NLD for fundraiser**

**By Ei Ei Toe Lin**

LEADERS of Myanmar and Thailand last week agreed to invite Japan as a third investor in the floundering Dawei project during a visit between six sub-committees established by both sides.

The Dawei Deep Sea Port and Special Economic Zone will directly affect those living in project areas and will continue for 10 years, from 2010 to 2019.

The project comprises three phases, to be carried out over a period of approximately 16 years, from 2010 to 2019, although it has been delayed.

U Tin Maung Swe said the first phase should be completed by 2015.

Clariﬁcation:

The article “No belief in peace process: survey”, published in the December 17-23 edition (No 657) of The Myanmar Times, incorrectly stated the number of people surveyed was 526. The number surveyed was 529. The article also stated that most respondents did not believe that either the government or armed ethnic groups wanted peace. The organisations that conducted the survey said that most respondents “have doubts that the peace processes would be successful”. The organisations also said that “121 respondents said there were rape cases and 62 respondents mentioned that civilians were killed during armed conflict”, rather than what we reported, which was: “Respondents said they witnessed or were victim to 121 cases of rape and 62 deaths.” We regret any confusion this may have caused.

**Dawei Special Economic Zone development in January**

**Pic: AFP**

The Special Economic Zone will directly affect 16 villages, with 3984 households totalling 23,120 people forced to relocate.

Ko Lay Lwin from Nabule village tract said the developers paid what they asked but residents still are not happy at having to move.

“Don’t want to go anywhere and don’t believe in this development. There are three gas pipeline projects that pass through Dawei but we still have to pay K45 a unit for electricity. We are worried wherever we hear the words ‘development project’,” he said.

But Ko Ye Lwin Myint, a member of the Dawei Development Association, said he preferred Japanese investors to those from China.

“I think Japan values its image and the Japanese government is transparent. However, we have to watch closely so that our region is not too damaged by this development,” he said.

According to the initial project plan, Ital-Thai will get a 75-year concession to develop the area and will provide 50 percent of the investment for phase one, estimated at US$8.6 billion. Max Myanmar was to invest 25pc.

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Kachin fighting intensifies: sources

By Bill O'Toole

INTENSIFYING conflict in northern Myanmar has opened a new front south of the Kachin Independence Army's stronghold in Laiza and near the town of Maymyo on the China-Myanmar border for the first time in more than a year, sources said last week. They said it was the worst stretch of fighting between the government and KIA since its ceasefire declaration ended in June 2011.

"Day by day the fighting is continuing," said U Myint Thane, joint general secretary of the National Council of the Union of Burma, based in Thailand. "It has disappeared all over." Speaking from the group's headquarters in Chiang Mai, KIO central committee member Wawkhying Sin Wa said he wasn't sure of the exact scale of the fighting. "But we've had reports that there are over 400 Tatmadaw [troops] near Laiza and more than 500 near Pangwa," he said.

Sources familiar with the conflict say the Tatmadaw has expanded its arsenal in the region, launched a massive artillery barrage and is using machine-gun equipped helicopters and heavy artillery against the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) troops that have been in the area since the beginning of the year. The magazine's Yangon office last week confirmed the reports.

"We need more money to feed the IDPs (internally displaced people)," he said. "We only have a handful of assistants." A senior official from the Kachin Baptist Convention, who asked not to be named, said: "I have no right to say what is taking place in Kachin State, although I know what is taking place in Kachin State!"

Many aid workers in the region are concerned about the effect this new round of fighting will have on the many camps for people displaced by the conflict that are scattered throughout the area controlled by the KIA. Mr Sin Wa estimated hundreds of people have been displaced just in the past two weeks of fighting against the Tatmadaw.

"The people [in the Pauktaw [Pangwa] area] are afraid because the fighting is happening near their camps," he said. While the KIO maintains that its armed wing is acting purely in a defensive role, the Tatmadaw claims reports from Hpakant of KIA soldiers attacking police and military installations. Wawkhying Sin Wa acknowledged that its armed wing is acting in a defensive role, but added: "We couldn't keep in close touch with the public, there were gaps in the writing. We opened an official newsroom in Yangon to keep in touch with the public when we got an official license to distribute," she said.

"We need to stand as an independent and forthright media. That's why we only came to the public when we got an official license to distribute," she said.

EXILE English-language news magazine The Irrawaddy has finally gone on the market in Myanmar, with copies distributed legally within the country for the first time.

Copies of the first two editions of the magazine will be distributed for free.

"The magazine got official permission two weeks ago to distribute copies in Myanmar for the first time," said Ma Aye Chan Myate, editor of the magazine's Myanmar-language edition.

The magazine's head office is in Chiang Mai and the English-language edition of The Irrawaddy has been published since 1993. Distribution inside Myanmar was banned by the military regime but two months ago The Irrawaddy opened an office in Yangon on 32nd Street. It now employs more than 25 journalists, some of whom relocated from its Chiang Mai office.

Ma Aye Chan Myate said this would improve the editorial balance in the magazine, which she said was reduced from a monthly to a quarterly in December 2010 due to "improve the editorial balance in the magazine, which she said was reduced from a monthly to a quarterly in December 2010 due to sceptical", published in the December 17-23

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, is the largest global development institution focused exclusively on the private sector. We help developing countries achieve sustainable growth by financing investment, mobilizing capital in international financial markets, and providing advisory services to businesses and governments. In FY12, our investments reached an all-time high of more than $20 billion, leveraging the power of the private sector to create jobs, spark innovation, and tackle the world's most pressing development challenges. For more information, visit www.ifc.org.

IFC’s engagement in Myanmar focuses on promoting inclusive growth through investment and advisory engagements that: i) improve the investment climate to enable the broader population to participate in and benefit from Myanmar’s economic reform program and support investment likely to create job opportunities for the population; ii) increase access to finance for micro, small and medium enterprises by supporting the establishment of commercial microfinance and to support the banking sector to increase lending to SMEs; and iii) to support the development of infrastructure to reduce key impediments to commerce and reduce operating costs.

Our operations in Myanmar will grow in 2013, and we are looking for qualified applicants for the following five positions. Successful candidates will be expected to contribute to the development of IFC’s Myanmar Program by developing excellent client relations, designing and implementing projects for meaningful development impact, and ensuring IFC procedures are respected. In addition, successful applicants are expected to actively identify new opportunities for IFC, provide input to IFC’s strategy and build relationships with industry stakeholders.

Operations Officer, Investment Climate Program (Position #12013)

Our work to support the Investment Climate in Myanmar seeks to improve the policy and regulatory environment for doing business. To achieve this goal, projects support the development and implementation of key policies, regulations and institutions related to investment and business operations. Activities include supporting dialogue with public and private sector stakeholders and promoting public-private engagement on sector-specific policy and regulatory issues on private sector development issues; advocating for policy reforms through publications, seminars and the media, and promoting IFC's brand.

Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/jobs and choose the vacancy number 12013.

Operations Officer, Access to Finance Program (Position #122967)

IFC’s Access to Finance Program in Myanmar will include programs in microfinance, bank advisory, financial infrastructure and mobile banking. In these areas, IFC is engaging at both the sector level as well as with selected institutions to create a demonstration effect in the marketplace, with the goal to support sustainable private sector institutions that serve a large number of low-income, urban and rural households.

Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/jobs and choose the vacancy number 122967.

Senior Investment Officer (Position #120367)

IFC is seeking an experienced Investment Officer to join our current team to develop new business opportunities and manage our local client relationships. The incumbent will play an active role in developing IFC’s investment portfolio through business development, establishing strong client relationships and working on project proposals. The successful candidate will interact directly with our local and global clients, and will work with IFC colleagues from headquarters and regional offices. While prior experience will be emphasized, the incumbent will have the opportunity to upgrade skills by attending on-site and off-site training seminars.

Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/jobs and choose the vacancy number 120367.

Country Officer (Position #123068)

The Country Officer is a senior position responsible for developing and maintaining relationships with the business community, government officials and the development partner community, and promoting and coordinating IFC’s investment and advisory activities in Myanmar.

Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/jobs and choose the vacancy number 123068.

Program Assistant (Position #123055)

The successful candidate will provide logistical and secretarial support for the Myanmar office, coordinate extensively with service units and liaise frequently with team members both at headquarters and in the field, as well as with external counterparts. The Program Assistant is also responsible for additional tasks, including translating/drafting a variety of standard documents, applying effective proofreading and grammar skills.

Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/jobs and choose the vacancy number 123055.

Interested candidates should apply on-line at http://www.ifc.org/jobs and choose the relevant vacancy number. Please note that you need to register before submitting your application. The closing date is 13th January 2013. Only applicants selected for interview will be contacted.
At film awards, change is in the air

By Zonn Pan Pwint

AFTER six years, Myanmar’s Academy Awards are returning home. Handed out in Nay Pyi Taw since 2006, the ceremony for the best films of the 2011 calendar year will be held in Yangon later this month – the city in which the awards began, way back in 1952.

That is not the only change for the film industry’s night of nights. The December 30 ceremony will begin at 5pm, rather than 6pm, so that the broadcast is not cut off at 8pm for the national news.

But the most important difference with past years is that judges have the freedom to give the awards to the most deserving films and actors, rather than those that will not offend the tastes of the Minister for Information.

Tektahtoo Yin Yin Lae, one of 17 members on the judging panel, said judges were elated at the lack of interference from the Ministry of Academy Award this year.

“In previous years, there was another selection stage after our final assessment at the Ministry of Information. But this year the final assessment was really the final stage and the minister said that he will not veto our decision,” she told The Myanmar Times.

The changes come after long-serving Minister for Information U Kyaw Hsan was replaced by U Aung Kyi in August.

The judging panel, which comprises directors, actors, and technical experts, considered 15 films released in 2011 for the prizes.

The films expected to be awarded are Htar Wara Alintaymyar (Eternal Lights), Wit Kyaw (The Fate), Yin Kuow Nar (The Pain of a Broken Heart), Pon Kyaw Withmone (The Pollen of a Lotus Flower) and Mao Za Yar (A Way of Inheritance).

Tektahtoo Yin Yin Lae said judges were heartened by a noticeable increase in both the quality and quantity of eligible films.

“This year was more competitive than in the past. For example, Htar Wara Alintaymyar looked as though it would have taken home the top awards, Tektahtoo Yin Yin Lae said, adding that she preferred to recognise films with actors and directors that had never previously received an Academy Award.

“For example, I chose a comedian this year for Best Male Supporting Actor. I think most of the judges will agree with me,” she said.

She predicted that Htar Wara Alintaymyar director Tun Aung Zaw was the frontrunner for the Best Director prize. The film is set in a rustic village called Wanattachaung near Mandalay and shows the sacrifices of a schoolteacher.

Meanwhile, Pon Kyaw Withmone, directed by Zin Taw My Mg, was shot around Bagan, Mingun and Shan State and was visually captivating.

“Pan Kyaw Withmone was smooth and pretty – what you come to expect from a director like Zin Yaw Mg Mg,” Tektahtoo Yin Yin Lae said.

Long overlooked for the top awards, Tektahtoo Yin Yin Lae said comedies would also pick up some prizes, with A Mao Za Yar featuring Thu Htoo San as best choice.

Fellow judge U Kyo Soe Tun said the films from 2011 showed significant improvements on previous years in terms of visual and audio quality.

“The audio quality varied significantly but was better … we expect filmmakers in future to do their post-production work more thoroughly,” he said.

In previous years we were a bit afraid of what the minister would say, whether he would complain about our nominee list, but this year we have chosen the winners freely,” he said.

We are trying to select the best films of the year without bias or corruption. In previous years, we were a bit afraid of what the minister would say, whether he would complain about our nominee list, but this year we have chosen the winners fearlessly and the minister did not interfere,” he said.

Comedies created as a satire on modern politics or society are really rare,” he said.

U Kyo Soe Tun said judges had favoured actors who took on roles outside their normal acting range.

“Those who acted in roles that differed from their usual characters, like Phoe Phar Gyi … can expect to win an Academy Award this year,” he said.

However, he said the judges had taken a hard line on melodrama, particularly unnecessary, shallow or excessive displays of emotion.

“Those whose faces were covered in tears but showed no deep emotion otherwise are not going to be considered,” he said.

“But actors or actresses who have not been awarded in the past can be more hopeful this year.”

Like Tektahtoo Yin Yin Lae, U Kyo Soe Tun said judges had enjoyed the opportunity to select the winners freely.

“We are trying to select the best comedies of the year without bias or corruption. In previous years, we were a bit afraid of what the minister would say, whether he would complain about our nominee list, but this year we have chosen the winners fearlessly and the minister did not interfere,” he said.

Meanwhile, judge Htoo San Aung said he was hopeful this year.

“In the past can be more hopeful this year,” he said.

Those that have not been awarded before will be considered,” he said.

Otherwise are not going to be considered, but this year we have chosen the winners fearlessly and the minister did not interfere,” he said.

They can hope to at least get a Supporting Actor award,” he said.

This year we didn’t see many dramas like last year’s Moe Nya Rim Mat Myu, a story by famous writer Tekkatho Phone Naing,” he said.

But Pan Kyaw Withmone, a story by writer Khin Khin Htoo, is a drama in which the director and actors all did their jobs very well. Dramas are probably also going to get the awards for most originality and cinematography,”

Translated by Zar Zar Soe
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ASEAN+3 MACROECONOMIC RESEARCH OFFICE (AMRO) 2013 Staff Recruitment

AMRO, located in Singapore, is the surveillance unit of ASEAN+3 countries (www.amro-asia.org). AMRO is currently looking to hire the following positions: (i) Senior Economist, 1 Financial Sector Specialist, and 1 Legal Advisor starting from early 2013 (Fixed Term Hire). The candidates should be a national of ASEAN countries, China, Korea and Japan. AMRO offers competitive remuneration and expatriate benefits packages pursuant to the internal guidelines.

SENIOR ECONOMIST

SENIOR ECONOMIST will lead economists conducting country or regional macroeconomic surveillance, producing AMRO key regional monitoring reports and country surveillance reports. The candidate should possess: (i) Ph.D. in Economics, Finance, or related fields from a reputable university, or master’s degree with outstanding experience and knowledge; (ii) Excellent analytic skills in economics and finance; (iii) At least 10-15 years of relevant working experience, background in multilateral surveillance activities desired but not required; (iv) Deep understanding of the economic and financial and fiscal situations of ASEAN+3 members and advanced economies.

ECONOMISTS

Economists will, under the supervision of Senior Economist, conduct economic and financial surveillance of ASEAN+3 members (or advanced economies) and work on CMM related issues. The responsibilities include visiting member countries, drafting surveillance reports, preparing policy recommendations, and maintaining databases. The candidates should possess: (i) An advanced degree in Economics, Finance, or related fields from a reputable university; (ii) At least 5 years of relevant working experience, preferably related to economic policy issues; (iii) Familiarity with the economic and financial situations in ASEAN+3 or global advanced economies (local knowledge about member countries or experience with advanced economy surveillance will be considered as plus).

FINANCIAL SECTOR SPECIALIST

Financial sector specialist will, conduct financial sector monitoring of ASEAN+3 members and advanced economies, and work on CMM related issues. Main duties include field consultations and drafting monitoring report and policy recommendations. The candidates should possess: (i) An advanced degree in Economics, Finance, or related fields from a reputable university, (ii) At least 5 years of relevant work experience, and (iii) Familiarity with the economic and financial situations in ASEAN+3 or advanced economies.

The financial sector specialist should have expertise in one or more of the following areas: Securities market (equity and fixed income); Foreign currency market; Derivatives; Financial statistics; Banking industry supervision.

Legal Advisor will (i) monitor the compliance of ASEAN+3 members with the CMM Agreement; (ii) administer AMRO’s constitutive documents; (iii) ensure AMRO’s observance of domestic and international laws; (iv) develop and maintain internal regulations; and (v) draft international treaties and secondary rules (e.g. by-laws) and prepare for establishing an international organization. The candidate should have an advanced degree in law or related fields from a reputable university and wide knowledge and understanding of legal and regulatory frameworks. The legal advisor should possess: (i) a strong background in international law, (ii) knowledge about international organizations (working experiences within a comparable International Organizations is a strong plus). All positions require candidates to possess excellent oral and written communication skills in English. Qualified candidates should send your (a) CV, (b) brief description on the relevant working experiences, and (c) earliest starting date of employment at AMRO to AMRO@amro-asia.com. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

Outgoing ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan, who will be replaced by Vietnam’s Le Luong Minh. Pic: AFP

Promises of respite for ASEAN in 2013

Jim Della-Giacoma said the events of the past year have laid bare the deep fault lines that run through ASEAN’s diverse membership. "They are statutory at base, but to some extent, they’ve always existed," he said. "The ancient, violent, history of each country, which is the basis of their conflict, is still there."

‘The annus horribilus is almost over. And to the relief of all, the baton will pass from Cambodia to Brunei.’

Brunei has more experience of ASEAN affairs and a wiser understanding of the group’s consensus credo. And in Foreign Minister Tun Haji Bolkiah, and Second Minister Lim Jock Seng, it has a veteran duo who are actually liked by other members.

Cambodia’s Foreign Minister Hor Namhong is also experienced; indeed, at 77 and after fourteen years in the job, many believe he is past his sell-by date as an effective diplomat. More to the point, he is disliked by many of his ASEAN colleagues, who often winces at the mere mention of his name. That cannot be said of the quiet but warm Mohamed Nar of the avuncular Lim.

Of course, it is alleged that Mohamed only got the job because he is the Sultan’s brother, and that Lim is the brains behind the team.

Whether true or not, few dispute they form a competent and likeable team, so there is less chance of internal squabbling or the non-issuance of communiques under Brunei’s chairmanship.

That is something to welcome.

Yes, there is a trade-off in that little Brunei will not actively push for any major initiatives, but that is all well and good; what ASEAN needs now is a year of quietly restoring group unity and solidarity.

That process will be aided when the talented but excitable Pitsuwan is replaced at the end of this month by Vietnam’s deputy foreign minister Le Luong Minh, a more low-key apparatchik.

Typically, Surin has urged that Minh be given a greater mandate to act on behalf of the entire group, but there is little chance of that happening – doubtless much to Minh’s relief.

During his five-year term, Minh has said that talks on a code of conduct for the South China Sea and the implementation of a regional nuclear weapons-free zone will be his top priorities.

Good luck to him on both counts. There is no way the United States, China or India will agree to the latter goal, and while there may be talks about maritime sovereignty disputes, they are unlikely to go far.

Still, as long as such talks are even-handed and do not descend to the depths of rancour encountered in Phnom Penh during the past year, most people will be happy.

Said Della-Giacoma: “As the new secretary-general settles in, ASEAN watchers are not expecting as much public reflection in the coming year, especially with taciturn Brunei taking over the rotating chairmanship.”

Let’s hope he is right.
Govt takes lead on extractive industries

By Stuart Deed

It is meant to ensure better management for extractive industries of natural resources in a long investment environment, create opportunity for a frank and transparent discussion between private investors and the government, and join hands with the public-based societies of the private sector so as to be able to effectively deal with the tasks of extractive industry transparency initiative on behalf of the State," the notice states.

Other members include the Union ministers for environmental conservation and forestry, energy, mines and finance and revenue. The notice said the committee has been given until December 31, 2013 to accomplish its goals.

David Allan, an advisor for Myanmar non-governmental organisation Spectrum, a group seeking to help provide public input to the process and a member of Myanmar Coalition for Transparency, said the timing of the president's announcement was perfect.

"In the current extraordinary busy time (the government) need to send the right signals as quickly as possible," Mr Allan said. "This is a strong and positive signal.

Mr Allan added that the extractive sector in Myanmar has been "controversial" in the recent past.

"Many wish to see more transparency for investors in the sector, covering contracting processes, allocation processes and reconciliation on revenue flows. Some could say it (the formation of an extractives committee) is a logic progression to the passage of the FIL (Foreign Investment Law).

"Others might say that foreign investors want to be able to demonstrate what due diligence processes and other practices will ensure their sectoral investment will benefit the whole country and not just a few," he said.

"Others may say that the Letpadaung copper project issues have required responses in addition to the commission that has been set up. Or it could be that this has been part of a longer term plan, and developing it has taken time. Many observers will say that this is a very good move of many required in the area and applauded it," he said.

However, Mr Allan said that for Myanmar to meet EITI criteria it needs to set up a multi-stakeholder group that includes representatives from government, industry, civil society and the public.

"The process for determining representation is an important process in the eventual EITI candidacy application," Mr Allan said.

He added that some within the extractive industry have welcomed the president's announcement. "One response I had from an existing extractives investor was that the first step in Myanmar joining the EITI group and hence pledging transparency in the resource sector. Good news."

"Some may be concerned about the additional burden of reporting, but most responsible groups will welcome it as it gives them a chance to show what they are contributing to Myanmar's finances, and counteract the accusation that the extractives sector only exploits and doesn't spread benefits around," Mr Allan said.

An oil and gas consultant, who asked not to be named, said Western extractives companies would welcome the announcement: "We are familiar with doing business in a responsible manner and any action by the government to increase transparency will make us more competitive."

"Others might say that this is a very important step forward in what will be quite a process."

"There are many important questions this authority and the multi-stakeholder group will be needing to discuss that determine how implementation will proceed. There is much learning from other countries on this," he said.

Mr Allan added that international experience shows that disaggregated reporting is critical to maximise understanding of which level of government authorities various benefits flow to, as well as from which exact project areas.

"To what degree of detail should Myanmar report in a disaggregated way? International experience shows that the most value from the process comes from ensuring that payments are as detailed as possible," he said.

"Also critical for Myanmar's people is how the benefits from natural resource projects are spent. For more information on this, it is the national budget process that is most important. In Myanmar's democratic society the public will want more involvement and information on the budget process and the transparency of the process. The availability of documents like a 'Citizens Budget', the 'Auditor General's Report' and the 'Executive Budget Proposal', which links the government's proposed expenditure work plan to the national budget, can be expected to be of great interest to the people."
Companies vie for Mandalay airport tender

By Tim McLaughlin

FROM white elephant to multimillion-dollar deal, the opportunity for Myanmar's transport minister to tender for a contract to upgrade Myanmar's International Airport is regarded as a golden opportunity. It is the challenge for seven consortiums prequalified to respond to the tender for a contract to upgrade, operate and manage the airport to meet the country's growing demands.

Seven consortia from a list of 16 applicants are now in the running to upgrade the international airport at Mandalay's Hanthawaddy International Airport and expand and operate it for the Ministry of Transport's Department of Civil Aviation in the country's second-largest city.

Transport's Department of Civil Aviation appointed a shortlist of seven consortia, selected from 16 applicants, in the December 17 edition of the state-run New Light of Myanmar. The consortiums feature two to five companies, with at least one foreign and one Myanmar firm, and the seven were chosen based on financial experience, experience record, qualified personnel and financial resources.

Among the companies seeking to win the tender are the operators of Munich, Dublin and Phnom Penh airports, along with many of the country's largest known construction firms, such as Htoo Construction and Asia World Engineering Co and Shwe Taung Development Engineering of Malaysia and China Harbour Engineering Co of Myanmar.

The Ministry of Transport's Department of Civil Aviation, said the tender was fair because it was managed by a consulting firm from Japan.

It is not known when the winner will be announced but U Win Swe Tun, deputy director general of the Department of Civil Aviation, said the tender was fair because it was managed by a consulting firm from Japan.

The selection process will be undertaken by a committee headed by Transport U Nyan Tun Aung.

According to the government, Mandalay International Airport is capable of handling three million passengers a year but received fewer than 1.5 million international flights a week. While it was completed in 2000, the airport already needs a new terminal building, its electrical and water systems, a runway lighting, according to the Department of Civil Aviation.

However, some argue it is in a position to benefit from Myanmar's upstart location and the country's lack of infrastructure or services.

"In 10 years Mandalay could be a regional hub on level with Singapore or Bangkok," the Yangon-based consultant said, noting that Mandalay's flights pass over Myanmar daily but never touch down.

According to the Asian Development Bank, international visitor arrivals were up by more than 25 percent in 2011, and the annual number of visitors is expected to reach 10 million mark this year.

Another potential attraction of Mandalay airport is its 25,000 acre site, which provides plenty of space for planes and maintenance facilities.

Among the prequalified companies last week was a consortium featuring two Japan-based companies, Mitsubishi Corporation and JALUX Inc, with Serge Pun and Associates (SPA), a Singapore-based consultant.

A view from the tarmac at Mandalay International Airport.

Project Management the Myanmar partner.

Munich Urban Frontier Aung Myan

Air consortium comprises

MunichGMBH of Germany, First Myanmar Investment Holdings of Singapore. First Pacific Company of Hong Kong, First Myanmar Investment and Yoma Strategic Holdings of Singapore.

UBC, which both fly to Mandalay airport. China Harbou Engineering Co, Ltd is the smallest consortium in terms of the number of companies, featuring just China Harbou Engineering and Asia World Co, Ltd.

Through the majority of the company's projects are marine related, another subsidiary of China Communications Construction Company, site, which provides plenty of space for planes and maintenance facilities.

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Electricity price on the rise

By Soe Sandar Oo and Htoo Aung

The Ministry of Electric Power is set to compensate for an estimated K368.952 billion (US$430) million loss in the 2013-2014 fiscal year by increasing the price of electricity and natural gas, senior representatives of Myanmar Electric Power Enterprises (MEPE) announced last week.

Due to General Transformer’s plans to increase their electricity price and the rising price of natural gas, the Ministry of Electric Power will continue to lose millions if the pricing system remains the same, said Daw Zaw Zaw Than, general manager of the MEPE’s financial department, on December 19.

“We buy and distribute the electricity at a normal price, so the Ministry of Electric Power is losing money. We lose one kyat and 74 pyar for each unit we sell to the Yangon Electricity Supply Board. The Ministry of Electric Power has lost K16.751 billion ($21.9 million) in the 2012-2013 fiscal year,” she said.

The Ministry of Electric Power is currently buying electricity from General Transformer, Hydropower Generation Enterprise and Shwe Li Hydropower Generation Enterprise, and offshore natural gas from the Ministry of Energy.

Currently, 67 percent of electricity is sourced from Hydropower Generation Enterprise, while 22pc is sourced from General Transformer and 10pc is sourced from Shwe Li Hydropower Generation Enterprise. General Transformer’s contribution will increase to 31pc after March 2013.

“One of our biggest problems is that we need to buy more natural gas,” Daw Zaw Zaw Than added.

The price of natural gas is currently $5 for one British Thermal Unit (BTU). However, the price will rise to $11.196 per BTU after

Japanese back Myanmar electrics

By Justin Heifetz

MEIDENSHA Corporation (MEIDEN) has moved into Myanmar, signing a technical transfer agreement with Asia General Electric Co, Ltd (AGE) and a Memorandum of Understanding between AGE and Japan’s Metal One Corporation, MEIDEN’s President and CEO Junzo Inamura announced last week.

On December 17, the Tokyo-based electronics equipment maker signed with AGE, a national transformer manufacturing and sales company, to build a local network for power transmission and distribution.

Development will focus on transformer design, manufacturing and repair.

“Through the supply of the low cost and high-quality licensed products manufactured by AGE, MEIDEN will reinforce its competitive edge in the Southeast Asian Region,” MEIDEN’s official announcement states.

“AGE will have the latest technology on high quality medium and large power transformers and it will solidify its presence as the largest supplier of power transformer in Myanmar,” the announcement continues.

MEIDEN also signed an MoU between AGE and Metal One, Japan’s leading steel trading house, for the study of equity investment. “If the equity investment is made, it will be the first case of equity investment from Japan to a power infrastructure-related company in Myanmar,” MEIDEN’s announcement states.

Under the conditions set out in the MoU, Metal One will provide AGE with electromagnetic technology to manufacture medium and large transformers. The MoU also states that MEIDEN would consider investing in AGE if the cooperation is successful.

MEIDEN was founded in 1897, and employs nearly 8,000 people. The corporation is listed on the 1st Section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange.
Woodside Petroleum is seeking a license for oil exploration in the Rakhine Basin. Pic: AFP

Woodside gets deal for another Myanmar license

By Stephen Bell

PERTH – Woodside Petroleum Ltd said on December 17 it will acquire a 50 percent stake in a second exploration license offshore Myanmar, expanding its overseas footprint further as it seeks to reduce a reliance on Australian gas developments for growth.

Woodside’s offer to acquire the interest in block A-6 in Myanmar’s Rakhine Basin has been accepted by license owner MPRL E&P Pte Ltd. Woodside said in a statement on its website.

The deal, which is subject to several conditions including due diligence and government approvals, provides an option for future drilling, the company said.

“The proposed agreement also provides Woodside and MPRL E&P with the opportunity to participate jointly in future deepwater bid rounds,” it added.

It follows Woodside’s deal in October to acquire a 40pc stake in Daewoo International Corp’s production sharing contract for block AD-7, also in the Rakhine Basin. – Wall Street Journal

The Ministry/despite the industrial sector

Govt to draft first worker safety law

By Shwe Yee Saw Myint

THE first law on safety and health in workplaces is being drafted by the Ministry of Labour and will be promulgated in 2013, a senior ministry official said last week.

“The law will aim to prevent air and water pollution and improve safety standards, including fire prevention, ensuring construction workers use protective equipment, ensuring the safety of workers operating and taking precautions for future drilling, the company said.

U Si Thu Aung spoke about the draft law during a seminar on occupational health and safety at the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Yangon on December 15.

“We are considering the safety of all workers in Myanmar’s construction industry. We hope that the law will be obeyed and will ensure the safety of the country’s labourers,” Minister for Labour U Maung Myint said during the seminar.

“According to section 24 of Myanmar’s constitution, the government must provide the means to protect workers so we have the task of drafting this new labour law,” he said.

According to the Ministry of Labour, 33 people died in workplace accidents this year.

“The law will aim to prevent electrical fires. We have to pay more attention to implementing a means of protection, and it must be done under the law,” said U Khin Myo, deputy director of the Electrical Inspection Department.

“According to a statement from the Ministry of Electric Power’s Electrical Inspection Department, about three electrical workers die a month from accidents, which are most common at garment factories. “At the construction site, the system for water and power often causes electrical fires. We have to try to prevent our workers from harm through our own experience working, but we want to know how to prevent harm systematically. The construction site is full of danger, and many workers die falling down elevator shafts or from electrocution.”

Thais tie up a new net factory deal

Thailand-based Mitsui Company is in talks with the Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF) to invest in Myanmar’s first fishing net factory, an MFF representative said last week.

“There is no fishing net factory in Myanmar, so fishermen and fish farmers are faced with many difficulties. There will be a factory coming soon,” said MFF member U Han Htun announced on December 18.

A fishing net factory had originally been planned for construction in Yangon’s In Sein township in 1972. However, the construction was never eventuated and local fishermen have had no other option but to buy expensive fishing nets from neighbouring countries, according to the MFF.

“New construction sites need a drain for waste, a good sanitation system, fire alarms and a safety net for construction workers. These precautions need to be widely understood by workers entering the industry,” she said.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Electric Power’s Electrical Inspection Department, about three electrical workers die a month from accidents, which are most common at garment factories.

“A factory coming soon,”

A fisherman nets his catch at Inle Lake in March 2008. Pic: Douglas Long
BlackRock sees distortions in credit ratings

By Sebastian Boyd & Ye Xie

Credit rating companies are distorting capital markets by assigning the same debt ranking to countries from Italy to Thailand and Kazakhstan, according to BlackRock Inc (BLK), the world’s biggest money manager.

While 23 countries share the BBB+ to BBB- levels assessed by Standard & Poor’s, the lowest investment grades, up from 13 in 2008 at the beginning of the financial crisis, their debt to gross domestic product ratios range from 12 percent for Malaysia to 148pc for Italy, International Monetary Fund estimates show. The cost of insuring against a default by Italy, ranked BBB+, over the next five years is almost triple that for Thailand, which has the same rating.

For BlackRock, which overseas US$2.7 trillion in assets, the measures are so untrustworthy that the firm is setting up its own system to gauge the risk of investing in government bonds. This year, the market moved in the opposite direction suggested by changes to levels and outlooks 53pc of the time, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

“The rating agencies were very, very slow to the game,” Benjamin Brodsky, a managing director at BlackRock International Ltd, said in a November 23 interview from London. “They all came after the fact. For us, this is not good enough.”

Since S&P cut the US to A+ from AAA on August 5, 2011, yields on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note have fallen to 1.76pc from 2.56pc. After France was downgraded on January 15, 10-year yields fell to 1.37pc from 1.97pc.

Ratings companies, the arbiters of creditworthiness and the likelihood of default by governments and companies in the $46 trillion global debt market, are coming under more scrutiny from regulators and investors. When S&P downgraded the US, a Treasury official said the company had made a $2 trillion error. France’s top central banker said Moody’s Investors Service’s ranking is wrong. Russia’s deputy finance minister said S&P and Fitch Ratings exaggerated its weaknesses relative to higher-rated countries.

A court in Australia found November 5 that S&P misled investors during the financial crisis that began in 2007.

BlackRock started compiling its own Sovereign Risk Index to measure countries’ creditworthiness in June 2011. The latest quarterly update in October rates Spain, Ireland and Italy similar to Argentina and Venezuela, among the 10 most risky countries.

S&P puts Argentina, which defaulted on its debt in 2001, at B+, six levels below Spain. Venezuela is B+, six grades below Italy and Ireland.

The New York-based fund manager sorts countries based on their willingness to pay debts, their access to external funding, the strength of their finance industries and fiscal metrics such as debt-to-GDP, according to Brodsky. The index shows Malaysia and Russia rank similar to the US, while the Philippines is no riskier than France and the UK.

“Ratings should be evaluated on the basis of their correlation over time with defaults, not with short-run movements in market prices,” John Piecuch, a spokesman for S&P, wrote in an e-mail response to questions from Bloomberg on December 6. “Ratings and market indicators of creditworthiness often diverge, because they are generated by fundamentally different processes and can be driven by very different factors.”

The number of countries rated in the BBB category grew as S&P cut European nations such as Spain that are mired in the three-year-old debt crisis and promoted developing nations, including Colombia, from below investment grade. Those ranked A- or above shrank to 43 from 52 since 2008, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

While S&P has downgraded Italy twice since September 2011, the country is still rated the same as Kazakhstan and Thailand. Italy’s economy probably contracted 2.1pc this year, compared with growth of 5.4pc in Thailand and 5.2pc in Kazakhstan, according to economists surveyed by Bloomberg.

“Rating agencies tend to be a lagging indicator rather than leading indicator,” said Neil Shearing, chief emerging markets economist for Capital Economics Ltd, in a telephone interview from London on November 19. “The giving is going too much weighting to rating agencies’ opinion.”

After S&P cut its rating on US debt to AA+ from AAA in August 2011, John Bellows, then acting assistant secretary for economic policy at the US Treasury, wrote on the MyanMar Times blog post, S&P said its decision wasn’t affected by the “change of assumptions.” – Bloomberg

The Myanmar Times
December 24 - 30, 2012

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**BGH to move into Myanmar**

**By Justin Heifetz**

THAILAND’S largest hospital group will set up a hospital in Myanmar next year to profit from the country’s expanding economy, a senior company official announced last week.

Dr Chatree Daungnet, vice president and chief executive of Bangkok Dusit Medical Services Plc (BGH), told the Bangkok Post on December 22 that the company hopes Myanmar will improve regulations related to acquiring land, transferring money and business ownership by the time BGH establishes a local branch in 2013.

Although BGH has already completed a feasibility study in Myanmar, the company’s plans for developments have been stalled by a lack of clarity over economic regulations, the report said.

However, BGH has confirmed that it will still proceed with plans to establish a hospital in Myanmar next year.

“Patients from Myanmar coming for medical services at our hospitals in Thailand now rank second to the UAE. This means Myanmar has strong potential,” Dr Chatree told the Bangkok Post.

The Nation recently selected BGH as its top pick in the Thai healthcare sector.

**New Parami bridge connects North Dagon, South Okkalapa**

A RECONSTRUCTED bridge across the Ngamoyeik River in Parami was inaugurated on December 19, state media reported.

The 600-metre long bridge connects North Dagon and South Okkalapa townships and passes over a railway line. It had been used by commuters for many years before being reconstructed to withstand loads of approximately 68 tonnes.

The bridge was formally opened at a ceremony attended by Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe, Yangon Mayor U Hla Myint, Region Minister for Forestry and Energy U Kyaw Soe and Region Minister for Planning and Economy U Than Myint. – Jessica Mudditt

**Vietnam inks $300m development deal**

**By Justin Heifetz**

The Ministry of Tourism’s Directorate of Hotels and Tourism signed a Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) contract and land leasing agreement with Vietnam’s Hoang Anh Gia Lai Group (HAG) for a US$300 million mixed-use complex in Yangon, state media reported last week.

Officials from the Ministry of Tourism met representatives from HAG on December 19 at Amara Hotel in Nay Pyi Taw to sign for the construction of the multi-purpose Hoang Ang Gia Lai Myanmar Centre.

The BOT concession contract comes after the ministry invited foreign companies to invest in Myanmar’s tourism sector.

The Hoang Anh Gia Lai Myanmar Centre, now in its first phase of construction, is being built on Kabar Aye Pagoda Road in Yangon’s Bahan township. The centre is expected to include a five-star hotel with business and recreation facilities; retail space and restaurants; and offices and apartments for lease.

HAG has announced that all legal procedures to develop the 8-hectare plot have been completed, according to Vietnamese news agency Tuoi Tre.

“The realty market in Myanmar has become heated after the country opened to the world, and we are speeding to grab this chance,” Le Hung, CEO of HAG Land, told Tuoi Tre on December 19.

“We have finished clearing site on the leased land plot,” he confirmed.

The first phase of construction is slated for completion by 2015, while the second and final phase should be completed by 2017, according to the Directorate of Hotels and Tourism.
Chengdu structure world’s largest

By Sebastien Blanc

CHENGDU, China – A thousand kilometres from the nearest coast a towering glass wave rolls over the plains of Sichuan, the roof of what Chinese officials say will be the world’s largest standalone structure.

The 100-metre-high New Century Global Centre is a symbol of the spread of China’s boom, 500m long and 400m wide, with 1.7 million square metres of floor space, big enough to hold 20 Sydney Opera Houses, local authorities say.

By comparison the Pentagon in Washington – still one of the world’s largest office buildings – is barely a third of the size with a mere 600,000 square metres of floor space.

The Global Centre is just a few kilometres from the US consulate where the police chief of Chongqing fled to seek asylum, triggering the fall of his patron Bo Xilai and exposing the biggest scandal in China’s Communist Party for years.

But it represents a different side of China, where lower costs and government subsidies are still fueling double-digit growth in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province.

The city of 14 million people plans to expand its subway from two lines to 10 by 2020, build a new airport and become a new Silicon Valley.

The Global Centre will house offices, conference rooms, a university complex, two commercial centres, two five-star hotels, an IMAX cinema, a Mediterranean village, a skating rink and a pirate ship, among other attractions.

About 400,000 square metres will be devoted to shopping, most of the outlets high-end luxury brands.

Despite Chengdu being around 1000 kilometres from the sea, the complex has a marine theme, with fountains, a huge water park and an artificial beach, centered by the undulating roof, meant to resemble a wave.

“This is an ocean city built by man,” said guide Liu Xun. “There will be 1000 rooms (in the hotel) and all will have seaside views."

The thick smog that normally blankets Chengdu risks making it a sunless sea, but visitors will not need to worry about that, she said.

“We have borrowed a Japanese technique. There will be an artificial sun that will shine 24 hours a day and allow for a comfortable temperature,” Liu said. The system uses specialised lighting technology that heats as well as illuminates.

The centrepiece will be a 5000-square-metre artificial beach, to include a rafting course and a seafront promenade, complete with parasols and seafood outlets that can accommodate 6000 people.

A giant screen 150m long and 40m high will form the horizon and offer sunsets and sunrises, accompanied by nautical breezes.

The exterior facade is near completion and an army of workers are rushing to finish the Chinese-designed building in time for a June 2013 international forum hosted by US magazine Fortune.

China’s incoming president Xi Jinping is expected to attend the event and meet the heads of some of the world’s biggest multinationals.

Another enormous building is planned across the road. Award-winning British-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid’s Chengdu Contemporary Arts Centre is to include a theatre, an opera house and a museum.

In a video developers China Exhibition and Travel Group describe Chengdu as “a world class modern city of idyllic beauty”, and say the Global Centre – including restaurants serving “the rarest oceanic fish species” – will bring to mind “the fabulous heavens”.

It is, they say, “a landmark which commands the world and is looked upon by the world with respect”. – AFP
Most US publications have mobile presence, finds industry survey

WASHINGTON – Almost all major US newspapers and magazines have a mobile Web presence and most of those without one will create one in the coming months, an industry survey showed on Thursday.

The report by the Alliance for Audited Media, known as the Audit Bureau of Circulations, said 90 percent of the publications in its members’ survey had a mobile presence, up from 51pc in 2009.

The remaining 10pc expect to follow suit within the next 12 months. “The survey showed publishers, unlike a few years ago, are starting to think about how to make mobile apps and platforms profitable,” said NBC News mobile chief Steve Luhnow. “They’ve smartphone and tablet apps or platforms are money-makers and expect these platforms to continue reaching and growing digital readership,” said John Sullivan, executive director of the Alliance.

The survey found that media companies are aggressively pursuing strategies to make digital platforms profitable. “Since 2009, 49pc of newspapers have a paywall to charge for some or all of their content. Combined percentages for newspapers, magazines and business publications show 41pc use a paywall,” said Sullivan.

DF of those without a paywall, 44pc plan to have one in the next two years. The most popular type of paywall is metered, where customers may access a limited number of articles before payment is required. “Some 56pc use metered paywalls, while 17pc use flat rate paywalls, while 27pc use subscription payment is required to read any content and 33 percent use no meter or paywall that restricts access to premium content,” said Sullivan.

The most popular platforms for content are print, on tablets and smartphones, which are meeting their mobile Web presence and are looking at digital threat to print sales. An Apple was the dominant platform for these apps: 67pc of publishers have Apple apps, and 85pc of publishers have Amazon Kindle apps. "Media companies know that delivering content whenever and wherever consumers want is key,” said Sullivan. “The future is mobile and tablet.”

"They key to digital content, including browser-based editions and mobile apps, is no longer the wave of the future, but the wave of the present," said Sullivan. "Tablets continue to be an important part of the ecosystem. They are meeting their mobile Web presence and are looking at digital threat to print sales. An Apple was the dominant platform for these apps: 67pc of publishers have Apple apps, and 85pc of publishers have Amazon Kindle apps. "Media companies know that delivering content whenever and wherever consumers want is key,” said Sullivan. “The future is mobile and tablet."
ASEAN pressures India on maritime rows with China

NEW DELHI – Southeast Asian countries last week urged India to refrain from using force to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea, saying it was “crucial” to maintaining peace and stability in the region.

ASIAN, the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, on December 20 called on India – which vowed to promote co-operation on trade and maritime security with the countries – to take a more decisive stance in the region.

Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Tan Dung asked for New Delhi’s direct intervention over South China Sea territorial disputes while Myanmar President Thein Sein said India should not provoke China, ensuring peace and stability in the region.

But India’s foreign minister insisted the issue did not require his country’s direct intervention.

China controls most of the South China Sea, including waters close to the shores of the Philippines as well as Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam, which have overlapping claims to some territories. China’s growing military power and its assertive stance in territorial disputes are often prickly and marked by mutual distrust – a legacy of a brief border war in 1962 – but they are trying to broaden trade ties despite political tensions.

In another development, an American defence official said on December 19 that the US plans to deploy some of its newest warships and other high-tech weapons to the Asia-Pacific as part of a broader tilt to the region.

US gun group demands armed police in schools

WASHINGTON – The United States’ most powerful pro-gun lobbying group demanded on December 21 that armed police be deployed to every school in the country.

"The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun," said National Rifle Association vice-president Wayne LaPierre, in his first public comments since the shooting at a primary school in Newtown, Connecticut, on December 14.

"Do something about it includes not doing something about it," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Pentagon has said it is planning to deploy more than half of its fleet to the Asia-Pacific and to station four littoral combat ships – speedy new vessels designed to operate near coastlines – for rotational deployments in Singapore.

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FRAUD and the Second Amendment

THE rise of the Second Amendment as a serious obstacle to gun control legislation is astonishingly recent. Its rise is a tribute less to the vision of the Founding Fathers than to the skill, money, and power of the contemporary gun-rights movement, which has transformed so disproportionate influence on the Supreme Court by putting forward a focused and well-funded social movement with both legal and political arms.

Recent deadly shootings in the US

To this the court added that the sorts of weapons it was protecting were those "in common use at the time" that the Second Amendment was ratified. There is no doubt that the right to have guns is a fundamental right, but a lot of gun-control legislation, imagined or proposed, would be perfectly consistent with the court's ruling.

In the political arena, opponents of gun control, armed with both organization and money, have been invoking the Second Amendment far more recklessly, transforming it as a firm obstacle to any effort to regulate guns and bullets.

As a result, they have made it difficult for Congress and many state legislatures, even to hold serious discussions about what sorts of regulation might save lives.

Consider this disturbing statement by Stars and Stripes reporter Halbrook, a lawyer who has represented the National Rifle Association in court. "They get a lot of coverage when there's a tragedy, gun violence, someone unlawfully killed with them in their hand," he said.

Reasonable people can debate about what policies would actually work. That is a debate worth having. It is nonsense to use the Second Amendment itself as a loaded weapon, threatening elected representatives who ought to be doing their jobs.

(Cass Sunstein, the Felix Frankfurter professor of law at Harvard University, is a Bloomberg View columnist. He is the former commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission, the Bureau of Industrial, and Regulatory Affairs, the co-author of Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness (2008), and the author of The Future of Government, forthcoming in 2013).
Israel warned at UN over 'provocative' settlements

UNITED NATIONS – The United Nations and UN Security Council powers on December 19 condemned Israel's heightened settler construction in the Palestinian territories as a threat to flagging peace efforts.

UN leader Ban Ki-moon and the UN envoy from several European Union countries, Russia and China warned Israel against building thousands of new settler homes approved in recent weeks.

UN ambassador Susan Rice did not join their public attack on Israel, but slammed the "provocative" set during closed UN Security Council consultations.

Israel has approved thousands of new homes in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem, hundreds of new homes were approved November 29 to recognise Palestine as a non-member state.

Israel gave the green light to plans for 2010 homes in the as yet unbuilt Givat HaMatos district in east Jerusalem and tenders for 1048 units in the occupied West Bank immediately before the UN meeting.

Israel provoked ire over housing permits

Israel provoked ire over housing permits

UN secretary general Ban said the Israel-Palestinian peace process was in "deep freeze," worsened by the settlement approvals. "I call on Israel to refrain from continuing on this dangerous path, which will undermine the prospects for a resumption of dialogue and a peaceful future for Palestinians and Israelis alike," he said.

The United Nations also called on Israel to end its freeze on transferring customs and tax payments that it collects for the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority.

Israel's UN ambassador Ron Prosor said the new announcements were "planning and zoning" and that it could take years before the government allows the start of construction.

The United States traditionally protects Israel at the Security Council. Using its power as a permanent member, it has vetoed many resolutions criticizing Israel, including over settlements.

US ambassador Rice however reaffirmed growing US impatience with its ally during closed talks at the council, diplomats said on condition of anonymity.

She said the settlements are "counterproductive" and added that the United States is disappointed that Israel insists on continuing a pattern of provocative action." -AFP

Rhino killings set record

JOHANNESBURG – At least 693 rhinos have been killed in South Africa this year, a record toll as demand for their horns continues to surge on the black market in Asia, the government said on December 19.

More than 60 percent of the slaughtered pachyderms were from the vast Kruger National Park, South Africa's largest wildlife reserve and the country's top safari destination.

Rangers a week earlier predicted around 20 more animals will be killed before the end of the year in the park, which boasts 60 percent of the world's rhino population.

The number of rhinos poached in South Africa has climbed sharply from 13 in 2007 to 440 last year. -AFP

Savile report raps BBC, but clears it of cover-up

LONDON – An official report on December 19 strongly criticised the BBC's handling of allegations of child sex abuse against late presenter Jimmy Savile, but cleared the world's biggest broadcaster of a cover-up.

The findings by an independent inquiry sparked the resignation of the BBC's deputy director of news, and led to the editor and deputy editor of the program at the centre of the scandal being replaced.

The report exposed the "chaos and confusion" at the BBC although it dismissed claims that its flagship current affairs program Newsnight dropped an investigation into Savile so as not to jeopardise Christmas tribute shows to him.

The BBC commissioned the inquiry by former Sky News executive Nick Pollard in October during a major crisis at the corporation that cost then-director-general George Entwistle his job.

Savile, who died last year at the age of 84, was one of the BBC's top TV and radio personalities.

The child abuse claims were first made public by rival broadcaster ITV two months ago and since then the independent inquiry sparked by the program's dropped Newsnight investigation has even implicated a former Conservative politician, Alistair McAlpine, in child sex abuse.

"The decision to drop the original investigation was flawed and the way it was taken was wrong but I believe it was done in good faith. It was not done to protect the Savile tribute programs or for any improper reason," Pollard said.

The scandal over Newsnight's dropped investigation was compounded when the program broadcast a television report last month which wrongly implicated a high ranking BBC executive and the program's editor, but cleared the late star.

Jimmy Savile, but cleared the broadcaster of any involvement in this abuse. -AFP

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Dated: 24 December 2012
PARIS – Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer’s snout has been immortalised in movies, books and song. But until now, no one had offered a scientific explanation for the glow that has made it one of the most famous antlered herbivores to guide Santa’s sleigh through the snowy nights.

In a study released on December 17, researchers in the Netherlands and Norway used a hand-held microscope to examine the nasal lining of five healthy humans, two reindeer and a sixth person with a non-cancerous nasal growth.

Reindeer noses have 25 percent more blood vessels than human noses, found the tongue-in-cheek investigation, published by the British Medical Journal in its Christmas edition.

The tiny blood vessels provide plentiful oxygen-carrying cells and help control the body’s temperature, researchers showed their findings, which were backed by an infrared image of a reindeer’s nose.

“In Rudolph’s red nose is because it is richly supplied with red blood cells, compared to purely dense microcirculation, and is anatomically and physically adapted for reindeer to carry out their flying duties for Santa Claus,” said the study.

Rudolph’s round-the-world flight has been chased by scientists for decades, but to the best of their knowledge, no one had ever examined a reindeer’s snout.

In order to deliver presents to children in at least 140 million homes where the Santa tradition is observed, Rudolph would have to travel at about 1000 kilometres (450 miles) a second, they estimate.

At such speeds, the reindeer, Santa and the dogs would be exposed to friction with the air, along with the gifts and any little elves or helpers who came along for the ride.

“Rudolph would need to deploy an air shield to protect their, or exploit loopholes in the space-time continuum so that they travelled between dimensions in order to deliver the presents on time,” Rudolph explained.

WHO malaria warning

GENEVA – The fight against malaria has slowed in the past year, the World Health Organization’s Global Malaria Programme told reporters in Geneva, cautioning there could be a resurgence of the disease in coming years.

The slow down was a regrettable in light of progress made in the preceding decade, WHO said, noting that between 2000 and 2010, the average malaria mortality rate plunged 26 percent, while 530,000 people were saved in Africa, saving an estimated 1.1 million lives.

In 2010, an estimated 219 million people were infected with the disease and 660,000 died, the UN agency said, revised up a previous estimate for that year.

“Everything around is grey. Even if something is another colour, all the same it has an element of grey,” Alyokhina, the mother of a young woman, who writes poetry and has taken part in poetry and has taken part in a series of investigations into a series of investigations into French culture and France.

“For example, what is the psychology of a reindeer after a winter’s sleep?” Alyokhina asked.

The camp is surrounded by fcnotes helping harrowing fumes and by coniferous forest, she said.

“It is an adventure,” added Alyokhina, who last month asked to be transferred to solitary confinement after conflicts with fellow inmates.

The camp is a “dead world,” which threatens to feel “noted, discarded,” she said.

She said she was transferred to the camp via three prisons, travelling in train cars and vans, before driving through the iron gates with 18 other prisoners.

The camp has a workshop where women sew 12 hours a day for maximum pay of 1000 rubles (US$32.57) a month, she wrote.

Alyokhina and bandmates Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Yekaterina Samutsevich were sentenced in August to two years in prison for hooliganism motivated by religious hatred after they performed a “punk prayer in a Moscow cathedral.”

Samutsevich was released on appeal with a suspended sentence in October because guards grabbed her before she could take part. They also get bonus points for visiting the library and contacts with the outside world.

“Everything a prisoner does is to get a ticket for early parole,” she said.

Alyokhina often looked exhausted at the Pussy Riot trial but was praised by observers for her confident questions to witnesses and lawyers.

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Samutsevich was released on appeal with a suspended sentence in October because guards grabbed her before she could take part.
Consulate attack probe slams ‘grossly inadequate’ security

WASHINGTON – A long-awaited inquiry into a deadly militant attack on the US mission in the Libyan city of Benghazi last week slammed State Department security arrangements there as “grossly inadequate.”

But the months-long probe released on December 18 also found there had been “no immediate, specific” intelligence of a threat against the mission, which was overrun on September 11 by dozens of heavily armed militants who killed four Americans, including the US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens.

“Systemic failures and leadership and management deficiencies at senior levels in two bureaus of the State Department resulted in a Special Mission security posture that was inadequate for Benghazi and grossly inadequate to deal with the attack that took place,” the report said.

The Accountability Review Board also concluded “there was no protest prior to the attacks, which were unanticipated in their scale and intensity.”

The attacks, in which the consulate and a nearby annex were targeted, have become an embarrassment and are an uncomfortable truth for the US administration for security failures as well as a possible cover-up over al-Qaeda’s role.

The US envoy to the United Nations, Susan Rice, came under relentless criticism for saying days after the assault that, according to the best intelligence, it was triggered by a “spontaneous” protest outside the mission.

Rice has since been forced to pull out of the running to replace US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who steps down early next year.

In the unclassified section of its report, the five-strong board said it believed every effort had been made to rescue Stevens, who died in the attack – the first US envoy killed on duty in three decades.

Clinton said she accepted “every one” of the 29 recommendations made by the ARB, which has spent the last three months investigating the incident.

She also said the State Department was working with the Pentagon to “dispatch hundreds of additional Marine Security Guards to bolster our posts” and was aiming to train up more diplomatic security personnel.

The New York Times reported the State Department is asking Congress to transfer US$1.3 billion from contingency funds that had been allocated to Iraq.

This would include $553 million for the extra Marines, $130 million for diplomatic security personnel, and $691 million for improving security at diplomatic missions, the daily said.

-- AFP

Attacks in Iraq kill dozens

BAGHDAD – A wave of attacks targeting both Iraqi security forces and civilians killed 48 people on December 17, in a second day of deadly violence in Iraq since November 29, when 50 people were killed. The latest violence comes after attacks killed 19 people and wounded 77 on December 16.

US military forces completed their withdrawal from Iraq on December 18, 2011, ending a nearly nine-year war that cost the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis, thousands of Americans and hundreds of billions of dollars.

Violence in Iraq is down significantly from its peak in 2006 and 2007, but insurgent groups still pose a significant threat, and attacks occur almost daily.

-- AFP

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For TOTAL SA


Easy win for Zuma in ANC leadership vote

BLOEMFONTEIN - South African President Jacob Zuma scored a stunning victory in the ANC’s leadership contest on December 18, opening the way for him to lead Africa’s largest economy until 2019.

Zuma, who has been in power since 2009, won 911 of the 2981 votes by the ARB, which has spoken and we are all part of that decision,” a triumphant Zuma said in brief remarks to delegates.

Businessman Cyril Ramaphosa won the deputy presidency setting him up to become Zuma’s eventual successor.

Zuma had faced an embarrassing, if lacklustre, leadership challenge from Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, who won 391 of the votes.

The vote took place despite the conference being threatened by right-wing extremists.

Police said four men plotted to kill Zuma, Motlanthe, government ministers and senior party officials. The plot was foiled and the men were charged with treason and terrorism.

Analysts say that after three years in power marked by crisis, Zuma faces a tough slog ahead.

He will have to work hard to win back South African voters, who increasingly see the ANC as out of touch, incompetent and corrupt.

Zuma’s poll numbers have steadily eroded amid a series of scandals. Criticism of his administration reached a crescendo earlier this year when police killed 34 striking miners in one day and it was revealed that about US$27 million of taxpayers’ money had been used to refurbish Zuma’s private home.

Despite public anger at the state of the country, the ANC is likely to romp home in 2014 as it has consistently received about two thirds of the vote in elections since the end of apartheid.

Opening the five-day meeting Zuma tried to reassure investors that he does not back calls for mass nationalisations and that the country is not “falling apart.”

The reassurance came as unemployment remains stuck at about 25 percent and the economy is growing at its slowest rate in three years.

Meanwhile crucial sectors such mining have been hit by strikes and violent protests and are struggling to modernise and reduce reliance on masses of cheap labour. – AFP
**NEW DELHI** – Riot police fired water cannon on December 19 at a protest in New Delhi over the gang rape of a 23-year-old student who was left fighting for her life, said the police.

"We can demonstrate in any number of ways, including by blocking roads, but in any case, this should not result in the type of anarchy that we witnessed last night," said national security advisor Shiv Shankar Menon.

"We have seen this happen in the past and we are not going to allow it to happen again," he added.

The police said they had arrested some 200 people and were still trying to identify others who were seen participating in the protest.

**SYMBOLOLOGY** – China has arrested 1000 members of a Christian sect known as the "Almighty God" sect in the past three years, the Chinese News Agency reported.

The arrests were part of a wider crackdown on religious and political dissidents that a new era presided over by a "female Jesus" had arrived and that turmoil and earthquakes would rock the world, the state-run Global Times daily reported earlier.

**BANGKOK** – The bloodshed prompted by the government's recent decision to suspend work on a campaign to vaccinate children against polio has led to widespread concerns about the safety of the country's children.

"The decision was taken after careful consideration of the risks involved," said a senior health official.

"It is in the best interest of the children of Thailand and the region to ensure that the polio vaccine is made available to them," the official added.

**JAKARTA** – Indonesian investors have given the government a clean bill of health for its economic policies, according to a recent survey.

"The government's economic policies are on track and are expected to boost growth over the next three years," said the survey.

"However, we must be vigilant and ensure that the country's infrastructure is in place to support the growth," the survey concluded.

**SOUTH KOREA** – The government has deployed troopers to protect citizens from suspected North Korean infiltrators.

"We are on high alert on the border and have deployed additional forces to protect our citizens," said a defense official.

"However, we are not taking any risks and are fully prepared to deal with any threat that may arise," the official added.

**SYDNEY** – Australia has announced that it will spend $525m in aid to Cambodia over the next three years to promote the country's economic growth.

"The aid will be used to support Cambodia's economy and its efforts to become resilient to external shocks," said the Australian Prime Minister.

"We will work closely with the Cambodian government to ensure that the aid is effectively used," the Prime Minister added.

**PHNOM PENH** – The Asian Development Bank has also announced $525m in aid to Cambodia over the next three years to promote the country's economic growth.

"We will work closely with the Cambodian government to ensure that the aid is effectively used," said the Bank's President.

**KATHMANDU** – A government survey has revealed that the number of new species discovered in the Mekong River basin has risen sharply in recent years, the UN said.

"The discovery of new species is a testament to the region's astounding biodiversity, and the news is particularly welcome in the context of the global biodiversity crisis," said a senior UN official.

"We will work closely with the local governments to ensure that these new species are protected and conserved," the official added.

**HANOI** – A devilsish frog that sings like a bird, scientists have identified 126 new species in the Mekong basin, the UN said.

"These new species are already struggling to survive, the conservation group warned.

"The good news is that new discoveries. The bad news is that it is getting harder and harder in the world of conservation and environmental sustainability," said Nick Cox, a member of the Mekong's Species Program, told AFP.

"Some are already threatened by illegal hunting for meat, skins, and the exotic trade," the program said.

"Others are already struggling to survive. The world's most intensive land-use, the fishery, has ended. – AFP"

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South Korean president-elect puts pressure first

SEOUL – Incoming president Park Geun-Hye, basking in her election as South Korea’s first female leader, promised on December 20 to stand tough on national security despite seeking engagement with North Korea.

In her first policy address since her historic win the previous day, Park stressed the “grave” security threat posed by the North as underscored by last week’s rocket launch.

She also pledged to work for regional stability in Northeast Asia where South Korea, China and Japan are engaged in a series of bitter territorial disputes.

“The launch of North Korea’s long-range missile symbolically showed how grave the security situation facing us is,” Park said.

“I will keep the promise I made to you to open a new era on the Korean peninsula, based on strong security and trust-based diplomacy,” she added.

During her campaign, Park had distanced herself from the hardline policy of outgoing President Lee Myung-Bak who suspended major humanitarian aid to the North.

Park had promised a dual policy of greater engagement and “robust deterrence” and had not ruled out a summit with the North’s young leader Kim Jong-Un.

Analysts say she will be restricted by hawks in her ruling conservative New Frontier Party, as well as an international community intent on punishing the North for what it saw as a disguised ballistic missile test.

“Given her basic stance towards Pyongyang and the rocket launch, she is unlikely to be the first mover in improving relations with the North,” said Hong Hyun-Ik of the Seoul Institute think-tank.

“But she won’t object if the second Obama administration moves to engage the North in dialogue after the dust over the rocket launch has settled,” Hong said.

China, North Korea’s only major ally, congratulated Park on her election and pushed for an improvement in Seoul’s ties with Pyongyang.

“We hope the North and South of the Korean peninsula can resolve their problems through peace at a means and realise a lasting peace,” said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying.

Park promised to work on building trust in Northeast Asia but, in an aside clearly aimed at Japan, stressed that stability had to be based on “a correct historical perception”.

Seoul and Tokyo are embroiled in a sovereignty row over a tiny group of South Korea-controlled islands in the Sea of Japan.

There are concerns in South Korea, where bitter memories linger of Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945, about rising nationalism in Japan under incoming prime minister Shinzo Abe.

Park is the daughter of the former military ruler Park Chung-Hee – a deeply divisive figure in modern Korean history. His 1961-79 rule was grounded in two objectives – defending the country against the North and economic development. He delivered on both but only through the ruthless suppression of dissent.

Park’s legacy loomed large over his daughter’s campaign and she publicly acknowledged abuses under his regime and apologised to the families of the victims.

On December 20 she paid her respects at her father’s grave, and also at the grave of one of his bitterest critics and political rivals, former president Kim Dae-Jung.

No compromise on islands, vows Abe

TOKYO – Japan’s premier-in-waiting Shinzo Abe came out fighting last week after his sweeping election victory, saying there can be no compromise on the sovereignty of islands at the centre of a dispute with China.

China reacted with alarm to Abe’s victory, after his conservative Liberal Democratic Party crushed opponents in national polls and he immediately restated Tokyo’s claims.

“The Senkaku islands are Japan’s inherent territory,” Abe told a news conference on December 17, referring to an archipelago Beijing calls the Diaoyu.

“Japan owns and controls the Senkakus under international law. There is no room for negotiation on this point.”

Abe declared himself ready to work with Japan on “further development of stable relations” but expressed disquiet at where Abe would lead Japan.

“We are highly concerned about which direction Japan will take,” foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a regular briefing.

“The current task is now to properly handle the current stage of the territorial dispute, she added.

Abe is expected to be elected as premier by fellow lawmakers when parliament meets for a special session on December 26.

The former premier has vowed to put the moribund economy back on track after years of deflation, made worse by a soaring currency that has squeezed exporters.

Topping his agenda was a promise to pressure the Bank of Japan into more aggressive easing policies aimed at kick-starting growth as the world’s third-largest economy slips into recession.

Voters on December 16 dumped Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda three years after his Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) promised a change from more than half a dozen years of LDP rule. The result cost Noda his party leadership.

The rout was completed by news that the LDP and its main ally, the New Komeito, secured a large enough majority in the lower house to override the upper chamber.

Fukushima plant operator TEPCO was a big winner on December 17, with its shares rocketing 33 percent, leading the charge by energy firms as investors cheered the likely end to a nascent move to snuff out atomic power.

Anti-nuclear sentiment has run high in Japan since last year’s disaster at the plant, with opinion polls showing a majority of voters want to phase out atomic power.

But the mood did not bring success for parties pushing for an atomic exit.

Analysts say the LDP’s victory came by default – with voters disenchanted by the DPJ after three years of flip-flops, policy mistakes and diplomatic drift, but having little faith in any of the alternatives.

With turnout at a record low even Abe acknowledged the outcome was not a ringing endorsement.

“I think this result means a ‘no’ to the political confusion of the DPJ. People will be strictly watching if the LDP will be able to live up to expectations,” he said. – AFP
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**Time out**

**Yagon lit fest aims to overcome culture of one-way lecture**

By Zon Pann Pwint

IN 2009 writer Ma Thida attended Brown University in the United States as one of the International Writers Project fellows.

During her stay the programmatically oriented movie event called There Will Still Be Light: A Freedom to Write Literary Festival, and declared their plans to invite Bendeka, Chit Thu Wai, Thaw Htoo Thar and Ma Thida. The main actors include Ko Gyi, based on a script written by Daw Myint-U.

Ma Thida suggested that well-known Myanmar novelist Nway Min Wint was invited, but when the organisers tried to find information about the writer on the internet they came up empty. There was simply no information about Nway Min Wint that had been posted online in the English language.

This was despite the fact that in his home country he had published nearly 200 short stories, as well as novels, travelogues, and translations and more. He had received the National Literary Prize in 2007.

"Because the festival only invited writers to give information online, they thought Nway Min Wint was not a popular author," Ma Thida said.

But "it’s not surprising that the names of many writers and filmmakers in Myanmar are unheard-of in the international literary world," she said.

She hopes this will start changing when the English-language Irrawaddy Literary Festival is held at Inya Lake Hotel in Yangon in February 2013.

Ma Thida will be among more than 100 local authors who are expected to participate as speakers and writers. Some of the talks, which she feels is the “first experience” that the works of Myanmar will soon be listed among the classics of world literature.

Ma Thida said the festival is the brainchild of Jane Heyn, the wife of the British ambassador to Myanmar. Among the international authors who will participate are Jung Chang, Sudha Shah, Timothy Garson Ash and Vikram Seth.

When I give literary talks in Myanmar, I feel it’s a one-sided conversation like giving a lecture. I hope the festival will change the entrenched habit of "They take part in literary talks," she said.

We will also get valuable experience in learning how to host literary talks and festivals in a way that is totally different from the ways it is done in the past. The talks will be thrown open to the audience and to readers, and we will evolve discussions, and questioning and answering," she added.

Ma Thida said such two-way interactions will benefit both readers and writers.

There are numerous genres and subgenres, and the works of local authors will be categorised. We will form the authors into groups, and members of each group will discuss the themes from their works," she said.

Alttan (Ray of Light) journal is publishing a series of short biographies of participating authors from abroad, to help familiarise local readers with their works. Last week’s edition included a biography of Chinese-born British writer Jung Chang, author of Swan and Miao: The Unknown Story.

"I can’t guess to what extent local readers are familiar with the works of authors from abroad. They might not know anything at all, and I don’t know to what extent they are enthusiastic about the festival," Ma Thida said.

But they will be inspired by the works of foreign authors and have a desire to read foreign literature.

Historian Thant Myint-U said it is not a one-off event.

"It is a great opportunity to put Yangon on the international literary map, though I hope that in the future there will be equal attention given to Myanmar-language works and works in Myanmar minority languages," he said.

He added that they will be displaying books by many famous authors during the festival.

"We are going to invite world-famous publishers and they will also display their books at festival," he said.

Ma Thida said an official launch ceremony for the festival will be held on January 5 at Inya Lake Hotel. The patron of the festival, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is expected to attend the festival.

**Film to explore hard life of migrants**

By Nyein El El Htwe

A TEAM of local filmmakers has cooperated with a Thailand-based non-governmental organisation to make a film about migrants from Myanmar living and working in Thailand, with plans to release the film next year.

The film, titled Father’s School, is produced by the Foundation for Education and Development (FED).

It was shot in Phang-nga, Phuket, in southern Thailand, and will premiere in the same region early next year, U Htoo Chit, managing director of the foundation, said at a press conference at Traders Hotel in Yangon on December 18 (International Migrants Day).

The dramatic film is about the lives of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand and their difficulties with education, health and social issues.

The film was directed by Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi, based on a script written by Daw Htoo Htoo Thar and Ma Ye Deight, Chit Thu Wai, Kaung Pyae and Thaw Htoo Thar.

U Htoo Chit said there are about 4 million Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand, but most are illegals who do not have passports.

"There are a lot of difficulties in their daily lives. As they are illegal migrants, they don't have labour rights like others," he said.

"But business owners prefer them because they don't need to pay them as much as other workers. And if they don't want to pay them anything at all, they can call the police. These workers don't have any public voice, so I wanted to let everyone know about their lives." 

FED was founded in Thailand in 2000, focusing on the development of awareness about the rights of migrant workers and their families.

Scriptwriter Daw Htoo Htoo Thar said that, during her own visits to southern Thailand, she saw firsthand the dangers and difficulties faced by migrants, especially children.

"One of the main themes of my script is that education because most migrant parents think their children don't need to be educated," she said.

"They take them out of school at age 12 or 13 because the kids can start helping their families earn money for the family. But the parents don't understand the long-term effects on their children's lives."

She said she worked on the script for about one year while staying in Thailand, and she included many true stories about people she encountered while there.

"Except for the two main actors, all the supporters are based on real characters. I even put U Htoo Chit in the story after I studied his actions, work and deep benevolence for migrants," she said.

Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi said he was approached by U Htoo Chit about directing the film while visiting Chiang Mai. He added that he did not accept until he had conducted some research into FED.

"After found out about FED, I decided to shoot the film and donate my directing fees to the foundation. I didn't read the script even after I accepted the project to make the film, but I was very thankful to get the chance for donating," he said.

Actors Ye Deight and Chit Thu Wai also donated their acting services to the film, and worked straight through the production period without asking for time off, said Chit Thu Wai, who also serves as a volunteer teacher for the foundation.

"The migrants were so thankful that we shot the film, as that we may also save warmly. I worked as hard as I could, and felt it was the least I could do for these families who are living in such difficult situations," she said.

The festival’s School will be screened in cinemas in Myanmar after it is approved by censors, Daw Htoo Htoo Thar said.

The Myanmar Times December 24 - 30, 2012
Huge crowd cheers Mraz, local singers

By Nuam Dawi

AROUND 70,000 music fans flocked to People’s Square east of Shwedagon Pagoda on December 16 to enjoy a concert by two-time Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Jason Mraz, supported by a cast of some of Myanmar’s most accomplished musicians.

The crowd estimate was according to the concert’s organisers, MTV Exit, the day after the event, which was aimed at not only entertaining the audience, but also educating people about issues related to human trafficking.

At a press conference held at Summit Parkview Hotel a few hours before the concert started, Mr Mraz said he has had some experience working with survivors of human trafficking, and he felt it was “important” to be part of the concert in Yangon.

“My name is ticked with him for a long time. It’s going to stick with me, what we will be able to accomplish here today. I’ll be able to tell people about this, I saw and music I heard. The story will beware of more people will know about this place. And those are the best souvenirs.”

The excitement generated by the concert braved the haze opened at 4pm, as a big crowd gathered of people from the hardworking to the stage.

Among the local musicians who performed were R Zarni, Lynn Lynn, Sai Sai Khin Hlaing, Phoey Gyi, Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein, Chit Thu Wai and Chan Chan, with backing music provided by The Trees.

Slot machine from Thailand played about six songs, while Mr Mraz and his band belted out more than 10 tunes, ending with “I’m Yours”, his most famous song among Myanmar fans.

The huge crowd was generally enthusiastic about the show.

“No world-famous singers come to Myanmar, so I was curious to see what kind of performances there would be at this concert,” said an audience member Hlaing Tha Tha Thu. “I told The Myanmar Times at the venue. “Up to now I’ve only seen these kinds of performances on TV. This is the biggest concert I’ve ever seen in my country.”

He added that it was the first time for Myanmar performers to alongside a world-famous act, which revealed some of the weaknesses of the local music scene.

There are many differences concerning the level of performance between local singers and international acts. I hope the local singers can do better next time,” he said.

On December 18, just before he left Yangon, Mr Mraz toured Shwedagon Pagoda, met with survivors of human trafficking and watched a Myanmar television special.

The concert will be broadcast internationally on MTV on March 13, 2013.

People’s Square earns its name with a concert for the masses

By Douglas Long

WHAT initially attracted me to the Jason Mraz concert in Yangon on December 16 was the fact that tickets were free, and the venue was within easy walking distance of my apartment in Sanchaung’s Myaynigone ward.

But there were a few other pleasant surprises along the way, including the rare opportunity to walk down the middle of Pyay Road (closed to traffic), to see the event with no street running over by an army of control buses, and the chance to gazzle as many litres as I desired of free Coca Cola.

As for her performance, As for her performance, Chit Thu Wai was up next – she’s the antithesis of the young woman, with a sweet face and song that together make her the poster child for why actors shouldn’t date good singers just because they’ve been successful.

Gifted singer-songwriter Lynn Lynn went onstage next, playing an all-toucher of light into the dimness. It’s a shame she moved to music such as Lynn Lynn was allowed to perform only one song whose subject was more respect than her concerts.

Singer Phoey Gyi marked a return to the forgettable. There was one song that was a radio or something, but the toothless tunes of her music ensured the complete absence of any lasting impression.

Local diva Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein sang from the ascent of the trench. As usual, she took the stage born aloft on a platform and wearing one of her ultra-baroque outfits. Being a lazy observer to compare her with Lady Gaga.

But there’s really no resemblance: Unlike Ms Gaga, the Myanmar singer maintains a safe-for-the-whole-family world content with her comfortable, social-boundary-normal realm, wearing one of her ultra-baroque outfits. She already has a lucky潦眼者 looking to compare her with Lady Gaga.

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Kengtong festival celebrates Shan culture

By Pinky

A CELEBRATION to ring in year 2107 on the Shan calendar was held in Kengtong in eastern Shan State from December 12 to 14, drawing up to 200,000 people to the fairground where the lively sounds of long drums and gongs could be heard during the event.

“We didn’t expect so many people to come for the celebration, but I think we had up to 200,000 visitors,” Sai Sam Tip (Tiger), secretary of Shan New Year Celebration Committee, told The Myanmar Times on December 14.

“We invited at least three representatives from every Shan subgroup in the country and from abroad. Almost every group came, and some appeared with big groups of 20 to 30 people,” he said. “More than 100 people came from Tachileik. They even postponed their New Year celebrations until December 16, so they could come here.”

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“Many people to come for the celebration, including donations to monks at Mvine Li Pain Shai Monastery, and awards given at Ho Kong Monastery to 75 monks who have earned master’s certificates at overseas schools.

At the end of the festival, members of various Shan literature and cultural organisations met to start planning next year’s celebration.

“We have not yet decided where next year’s festival will occur,” Sai Sam Tip said.

“Everyone will return to their hometowns and have discussions, and then we will all meet again to decide on the venue. Then we will bring a Shan flag on a silver pole to the celebration place — the flag will be moved to the new venue every year, like the Olympic torch.”

He added that in this way, “all different Shan groups will be connected to each other, and we will become only one Shan”.

The most crowded was the New Year countdown night on December 13, with people of all ages wearing traditional costumes with jumpers, jackets, scarves and hats overtop. Some even wrapped themselves in blankets.

The opening ceremony on December 12 started at 9:09am, based on the belief that nine is a lucky number.

Groups of Shan people started filing into the football stadium that served as the festival ground at 8am, with the venue rotating from city to city.

The evenings were filled with music and dancing presentations, and music adding to the cheerful atmosphere.

Around the festival grounds were vendors selling clothing, handicrafts and books from the different Shan subgroups. The Lahu booth, for example, displayed beautiful costumes that were black with red, green or yellow highlights and decorated with silver. Every piece of the costumes was handmade.

The evenings were filled with performances, presented on four stages: two for big singing and dancing presentations, one for traditional music, and one for all-night theatrical performances.

The main stage near the football stadium hosted dances from different ethnic groups, such as Tai Khuen, Tai Lue, Tai Long, Tai Lem, Lahu and Tai Khanti. There were traditional deer dances and kinnara-kinnari dances from Taunggyi, as well as Shan singers from Chiang Mai.

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Taliban in Afghanistan; in American soldiers fighting the ruthless pirates prey on yachts a place of discord, where North American Colonies are quarrelsome, unforgiving, roadless, godless, unfriendly, perspective, Europe is the restaurant called Thank Allah after-work drinks enjoyed at a is the dominant religion, with universities in the world. Islam is stuck in the 10th century. To another , England itself travel slowly from one country firearms and airships that Asia, including Myanmar and nations such the USA, Nirvana from abuses from both sides. 1141, and there's civil war Cambodia and several African nations. The result is that, in a country...
Phyo's Cooking Adventure

Ice cream cakes, a delicious and versatile holiday treat

**Main Tips**

Don't forget to use ungreased paper, so you don't destroy the cake when you remove it from the pan.

Prepare the liquor-flavoured fruit well in advance, so it is ready to add to the cake.

Don't let the ice cream soften for too long. Serve immediately after the toppings are ready.

**Quaffing Quote**

"We all have an ice-cream cake to celebrate! Except for we don't have a freezer!" — Kresley Cole, Dreams of a Dark Warrior

**NEXT WEEK**

Yummy pork ribs and rice noodle salad

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**Red Wine**

Chateau Lauduc
Tradition Bordeaux Superieur 2009

This blend of merlot, cabernet sauvignon, (50pc) and cabernet franc (5pc) offers a slightly higher alcohol content than standard Bordeaux, but retains a smooth, deep flavour.

**White Wine**

Jean Guillot Bordeaux Sauvignon Blanc 2010

When there's fish on the table, whether grilled with seasonings or prepared in a curry, this typical Bordeaux makes a harmonious and elegant accompaniment.

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ICE CREAM CAKE

**INGREDIENTS**

- 1 cup of vanilla ice cream (I used Nestle)
- 1 tub of chocolate ice cream
- 1 vanilla or fruity Swiss roll or jam roll
- 1 chocolate Swiss roll or jam roll

**PREPARATION**

Remove the ice cream from the freezer and let sit in the fridge for 15 minutes, to allow it to soften.

Meanwhile, prepare three rectangular aluminium baking or freezing trays as a mould for the ice cream cakes.

Lay the ungreased paper on the base of each tray, with the paper measuring the exact length of the tray but long enough to cover both the bottom of the tray and double over to cover the top.

Slice the Swiss rolls or jam rolls separately.

In a large bowl, mash a couple slices of the vanilla or fruity cakes, and mix with 1/3 of the vanilla ice cream.

Repeat the process until all the ingredients are used up. Mix well, making sure there are no lumps.

Prepare another bowl for the mixture of chocolate ice cream and chocolate roll.

Spoon the vanilla and cake mixture into the trays, dividing it evenly among the three trays.

Spoon only enough to reach halfway to the top of each tray, and press hard to make sure there are no air bubbles inside. Then spoon the chocolate mixture on top, filling each tray to the rim.

Press hard to mix the layer in the middle. Cut the ungreased paper to exactly cover the surface of the mixture. Bring the paper hanging at both sides together and fold it over the top of the mixture.

Wrap with clear plastic wrap, and then wrap aluminium foil on the top.

Freeze the packages for at least 6-8 hours, or you can prepare one day ahead.

To serve, remove the cakes from the freezer and leave them outside for 3-4 minutes to soften. Then unwrap everything and unfold the ungreased paper.

Pull the paper up, and the block of ice cream cake will come out.

Lay it on a plate upside down. Then you can add decorations and additional flavours.

Fresh fruit can be sliced and placed on top of the cake, and shaved chocolate will be sure to impress your guests.

Other suggestions:

- Orange flavoured cream
- ¼ cup of whipping cream
- 1 tablespoon of orange zest
- 2 tablespoons of orange juice
- 1 tablespoon of caster sugar

Whip the cream with the orange zest and juice until it turns into a paste. Add it to the top of a slice of ice cream cake, or decorate the whole cake.

Liquor-flavoured fruit

- ¼ cup of raisins or dried fruit
- ¼ cup of brandy, flavoured liquor or cognac

Soak the dried fruit in coffee-flavoured or orange-flavoured liquor, brandy or cognac for half a day. This can be put on the top of the cake, or added to the mixture before freezing.

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**Phyo's Cooking Adventure**

Phyo cuts through culture to reveal life's true taste

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**Food & Drink**

December 24 - 30, 2012

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**Preparation**

**Status:**

**Score BOX:**

**Score BOX:**

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**Preparation**

**Status:**

**Score BOX:**

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COLD evenings and hot afternoons could not keep Socialite from making her appointed rounds for the week, starting with the Silver Tiger Luxury shop opening on U Wisara Street on December 11. The next day she joined many local singers for the launch of Sone Thin Par’s new album at Park Royal Hotel. After needing a day to recover from all the excitement (Socialite ain’t no spring chicken), she was back at it again on December 14, attending the She Shines jewellery design show at Sedona Hotel. The next day was the Big One, featuring the Yves Rocher cosmetic shop opening near Shwegondine junction, E Mart electronic shop opening on Bo Aung Kyaw Road, Yee Shin new product launch at Chatrium Hotel, Nescafe product launch at Bahan township and, in the evening, a dinner reception at the YMCA. Socialite rounded out the week on the next day with the Nu Skin cosmetic product launch at Yangon International Hotel.
By Frederik Balfour

At the mention of tapas, I think of gentle Mediterranean breezes, starry skies and pilchards, charcuterie, prawns, spicy chorizo, stuffed peppers and a Spanish omelette washed down with plenty of vino tinto.

Three new Spanish restaurants, 22 Ships, Boqueria and Yi Go, forced me to completely rethink my idea of tapas in a city as dense and crowded as Hong Kong.

I abandoned thoughts of open-air eating as we rode the elevator to the seventh floor of LKF Tower and got off at Boqueria, the Hong Kong franchise of the New York-based chain.

We were the first to arrive at 6:30pm on a Saturday. The soft overhead lighting, candlelight and high stools and open kitchen created a cozy ambience.

The sangria was just right, neither too sweet nor overly spicy. The waiter thoughtfully brought us tiny spoons so we could scoop out the diced fruit.

We started with tapirones, a delicious dish of tender baby squid served in a romesco vinaigrette, tomato confit and crispy scallions. We wouldn’t let the waiter remove the plate until we’d mopped up every drop of the sauce with bread.

Next we devoured a plate of gambas, piping hot shrimp in a garlic and a red sauce. Calls for more bread and more mopping.

The bombas, a potato croquet filled with mincemeat and served with bread, was exemplary. The tortilla, however, was wanting.

The pollo inopia, slices of fresh pineapple served with mozzarella and fresh tomatoes, was simple yet sublime. The bill, including tip, came to HK$1250 (US$161). Two days later I arrived at 22 Ships around 8:15pm. It doesn’t take reservations, yet the table was readily found and reassigned quickly as we were able to consume three dishes of sangria with a healthy froth that made it look like a cocktail and snacks standing at a small counter just inside the door.

Our excellent starter of peas, broad beans, pasta curd and tender speck reminded me of the green pea risotto I ate at Gordon Ramsay’s now-closed Maze restaurant in Prague.

No coincidence there. Jason Atherton, the culinary director and part-owner of 22 Ships, created Maze for Rathbone before leaving to open London’s Politan Social, a restaurant that scored him a Michelin star.

22 Ships seats only 35 people, most of them squeezed around the bar, creating just the right amount of buzz. We got coveted spots at a counter opening onto the street, which is surprisingly quiet for the neighbourhood.

Our first dish was fried egg with black pudding, capers and anchovy whose description belied the dish’s lightness. But then again, I’m a sucker for anything with anchovies.

Next came scallop ceviche with yuzu dressing, cucumber and apple. My friend moaned in consternation.

We weren’t as enamoured of the salt and pepper squid with ink aioli, but only because our expectations had been raised so high by everything we’d tried up to that point.

They’d run out of the signature dish, char-grilled Iberico pork and foie gras with ink aioli, but only because we expected it to be as good as everything we’d tried up to that point.

A dish of salt baked beetroot, cheese mouse and almond powder at 22 Ships in Hong Kong. Pic: 22 Ships
A piece was enough to satisfy our cravings.

The goat’s cheese sorbet was delicious, though my date said the peanut ice cream with mixed berries tasted even better during a previous visit.

The bill, without the standard 10 percent service charge in Hong Kong, came to HK$108.

The third leg of our tapas triftet took us to Vi Cool, requiring us to navigate the endless corridors of Harbour City mall in Tsim Sha Tsui. It’s an odd choice of location for this first Hong Kong venue by Spaniard Sergi Arola, whose Gastro restaurant in Madrid has two Michelin stars.

He’s unlikely to repeat that success here.

Apart from the good service and one truly excellent course of sea bass, mango and avocado ceviche, our meal was just so-so.

The king prawns fried with ratatouille, grilled leaks, endive leaves and buffalo mozzarella was disappointing and the balsamic vinegar overpowered the fire-smoked eggplant dish. The dessert of ricotta and berries was about 80 percent cheese and 20 percent fruit portions that should have been reversed. We left more than half the dish unfinished. Total cost with service came to HK$518.

— Bloomberg

Dining Guide

22 Ships is on 22 Ship Street, Wan Chai; information: www.22ships.hk or +852 2555 0722. Boqueria is on the seventh floor of LKF Tower, 33 Wyndham Street, Central; information: www.boqueria.hk or +852 2551 8041.

Vi Cool is at Level 2, Shop 20101, Gateway Arcade, Harbour City, Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui; information: www.diningconcepts.com.hk/vi-cool or +852 2710 7717.


Sound level? Just the right amount of noise at 22 Ships, quieter at Boqueria, tolerable at Vi Cool on a Sunday night.


Date place? Boqueria: Yes. 22 Ships: Definitely. The small space forces you into close contact. Vi Cool: Only if it’s part of a shopping date.

International Airlines

Air Asia (FD)
33, Awan Pya Pagoda Rd, Ground Fl., Parkview Hotel, Yangon. Tel: 251 882, 251 866.

Air Bagan Ltd [WB]
Al-Amin Business Street, Bahan Township, Yangon. Tel: 251 852, 951 632; 253 888. Fax: 251 802.

Air China (CA)
Building II, center of Pyay Rd and Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd. Hotel Yangon, 7th floor, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: 251 852, 659 880.

Air India
P.O. Box 6430, Yangon. Tel: 251 997-99, 252 748, 248 175.

Bangkok Airways (PG)
#935, 3rd Fl, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada. Top, Yangon. Tel: 251 877, 255 246, Fax: 255 119.

Silver Airways (SM)
345/357, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, 2nd Fl. phone, Sakura Tower, Kyauktada. Top, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: 255 297-7 Fax: 255 290

Malaysia Airlines (MH)
339/357, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Pakhang Tower, Yangon. Tel: 381 148, 241 037. ext.: 120, 121, 122 Fax: 241 037.

Myanmar Airways International (MI)
8-01, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Top, Yangon. Tel: 252 296, Fax: 252 296.

Silk Air (MI)
339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, 2nd Floor, Sakara Tower, Kyauktada Top, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: 255 297-7 Fax: 255 290

Thai Airways (TG)
Room No. 1101, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Top. Yangon. Tel: 252 416-4 Fax: 252 209

Vietnam Airlines (VN)
410/16, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Top, Yangon. Fax: 252 296, 252 294.
was Jesus really born on December 25?

By Andrew Santella

HERE’S a thought for the herder among us who are uninterested in charts and tables — another Christmas season: There was a time when some scholars argued that the holiday should be observed in the spring, around the vernal equinox. Imagine three more months of shopping! But even to some Christians, Christmas has always seemed like a celebration of a last — and therefore unworthy — minute. A young church father Origen argued against celebrating Christmas’ ancient foundation, that date given for Jesus’ birth: “It is only sinners who celebrate the mother of Jesus, on this date. Nine months earlier to this date produces a December 25 Christmas.”

This alternate explanation is sometimes deployed to dismiss the notion that the holiday had any relationship to Jesus’ death, the date traditionally associated in the Bible with his crucifixion. But another, less well-known explanation is that the December dating of Jesus’ birth is based on a series of arcane calculations that hinge on knowledge of ancient practices of antiquity is not always as clear as we’d like it to be. The Bible offers little help for this task. The earliest Christian historians, recognizing the popularity of winter festivals, attached its own Christmas celebration to encourage the growing church, without the time and resources to be perfect in their calculations. Business historian John Steele Gordon has described the December dating of the Natalis Christmas as a kind of ancient world-marketing play.

Palestinian officials and members of the clergy follow a cart carrying a wooden sculpture of baby Jesus in the West Bank city of Bethlehem on December 25. (AP Photo/Sabeha Hammad)

The church only settled on December 25 after a long period of uncertainty. The earliest Christian writers were more interested in Jesus’ death than in his birth. The earliest of the Gospels, Mark’s, makes no mention of Jesus’ birth. Later, Matthew and Luke offer extravagantly detailed — stars, wise men, magers — but none specifically about Jesus’ birthday. This didn’t stop others from making their own guesses. The theologian Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200, mentions at least 10 sources that had by then been proposed as the true date of Jesus’ birth. Easter, the date that Christians observe as the Easter of Jesus’ death, had been established, so Christmas had to fall on a day other than Easter. Christmas was set near the winter solstice event of any pagan traditions but based on a series of arcane calendrical computations. This argument hinges on an ancient Jewish tradition that had the great prophets dying on the same dates as their birth or, alternatively, the December 25 was not mentioned as a possibility.

The reasoning goes that the growing church, recognizing the popularity of the winter festivals, wanted to establish its own celebration to encourage their conception. Thus, to follow this peculiar assumption, the first step in determining the date would be to date his death. Then, according to the Gospel stories, Jesus did not die in September. Early Christian writer Tertullian calculated that the date given for Jesus’ death in Luke’s Gospel corresponds to March 25 in the Julian calendar. Most Christian churches came to celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation (Mary’s visit to the Virgin Mary to tell her that she would become the mother of Jesus) on this date. Adding nine months to this date produces a December 25 Christmas.

By Astrologer Aung Myin Kyaw

Events Flash

Traditional arts

The “Living Life in Art” exhibition — featuring paintings by 10 artists including Thabye Myint, Aung Htar Thet, Khine One and Ko Soe — is being held at the Myanmar Traditional Art and Artists Organisation (187-192 East Wing, Bogoke Market, Yangon) from December 26 to 30.

Alliance exhibit

KZL Art Studio and Gallery (184/84 Thanlwin Road, Bahan township, Yangon) is presenting its year-end show from December 25 to 31. The show will be on display for three weeks. The work of more than 30 artists is on display.

Japanese film

Director Yasuo Furuhata’s film, “Parasite and Poppoyo,” (112 minutes) will be screened at the Embassy of Japan Assembly Hall of the Japanese embassy in Yangon on December 26 at 2.30pm. Free tickets are available at the embassy until the day of the show.

24th anniversary exhibition

Lokanat Art Gallery (42nd Anniversary Art Exhibition from December 5 to 10) will hold its 42nd Anniversary Art Exhibition from December 5 to 10. The show will feature the work of more than 25 eminent members of the artists of the gallery. The paintings are in oil, watercolour and acrylic on canvas and are mostly realistic in style.

Final Exhibit 2012

Gallery 65 (65 Yaw Min Gyi Road, Dagon Tharrawaddy, Yangon) is presenting its year-end show, the Final Exhibit 2012, from December 15 to January 15. The gallery’s full showcase paintings across a wide range of styles, from contemporary to traditional. Gallery 65 is open 10am to 6pm daily.

Calle de la Salsa

Tuesday is salsa night at 50th Street Bar, featuring free dance lessons (salsa, bachata, mambo, merengue and more) plus dancing shows and drink specials. With music by DJ Mani and special guests.

Wednesday wine

The Wednesday Wine Club meets every (you guessed it) Wednesday at the QP lounge (located at 32/41 Harfield Village). Taste four or five wines for $15,000 a person. Contact chad.quarto@gmail.com or 09-7321-8711.

Live music

Friendship Band belts out classic rock tunes at 50th Street Restaurant every Wednesday and Friday night.

YOUR STARS

By Astrologer Aung Myin Kyaw

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)

Focusing your mind on acquiring social knowledge, and focusing your heart on finding love, will make your life much better. Wonderful changes are on the horizon, and the performance good deeds will result in spiritual development. Family and social relationships will become smooth under a system of interdependence.

Pisces (Feb 19 - Mar 20)

The best way to communicate is to open your ears, observe closely and speak reasonably. Work towards enriching your soul, and a positive change in your love life will be welcomed. Don’t waste time on negative responses, but rather spend your time focusing on strengthening friendships and taking care of family responsibilities. Love yourself and learn to share your love with others.

Aries (March 21 - April 19)

Base all of your mental function on wisdom, and organise yourself to extend social communication into the realm of achieving your goals. Welcome old friends, and take them up on offers to lend you a helping hand. Don’t be shy about expressing your desires. Your wisdom is like a light: The brighter it shines, the farther it will reach into the shadows to destroy the darkness.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Creating a state of love from a state of pleasure is simpler if you are in agreement with the other. Use your wisdom to accommodate each other. Eventually, you will be in a state of equilibrium.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

Shine to turn the good into the better, and the better into the best just as you endeavour to convert possibility into probability, and probability into certainty. Maintain smooth relations even though those with whom you differ. Your emotional blank spaces can be filled by love, nostalgia or old acquaintances. A big change in your social circle could only lead to opportunity.

Cancer (June 22 - July 22)

Allow wisdom to lead you. Listening music and walking in the garden can be important emotional outlets. A misunderstanding developed of the soul will inevitably carry total psychological destruction. The pursuit of knowledge will help boost the quality of your mind and make clear your thoughts. The energy generated from hope and courage can be used to overcome fear.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)

Start an unnecessary war that will help you to develop relationships with potential partners. Reconcile with all beings in your society and show compassion toward yourself. Use wisdom to acquire the correct attitude. Avoid being affected by social pressure for new and good ideas. Life and love are big matters that require deeper exploration.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)

True love is rooted in the recognition of the moral and mental qualities of the beloved person. Know that compromise does not mean cowardice. It is true that one should give and receive, and not just give, but also receive something in return. Become aware of your moods and don’t allow yourself to be fooled by the low. Use your heart to add value to your relations.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)

Nothing and no one belongs to a fictitious person. Don’t forget to pay more attention to your old friends, and make plans to discover hidden opportunities with their help. You are in a good position to develop matters of love.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)

Attain more knowledge about the value of a clean conscience. Eliminate all that is vulgar and uncouth before you take on big challenges. Sharpen your intellect and increase your wisdom through concentration and meditation. Accommodate the needs of your relatives as much as possible.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

Take responsibility for developing your own character and integrity. You should be motivated by wisdom and appreciate the value of your role in politics. Understand the difference between self-promotion and selflessness. Invest in the vision of love, which will not fail an astute person.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

The law of conscience is higher than the law of government. Know that your achievements are always relative. — Slate

For a personal reading contact Aung Myin Kyaw, 4th Floor, Thanlwin Bazaar Road, Tarmwe, Yangon. Tel: 09-31315632, Email: myinmaunga@gmail.com

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THE FRENCH Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Road, Sanchaung, Yangon. Opportunities are required.
and English. Strong experience in a related field.
hold a University degree and 3 years experience in the project.
local tour operator (1) and marketing
and networking). Fluent in English & computer skill.
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is looking for a leading role in the hotel.
for: Head Office, Aureum Palace Hotel & Spa.
Auroville, Puducherry. Good knowledge of
for: Assistant Manager, Baw Zin St or Lan Thwe
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with the subject “Study Application” for
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and English. Interested candidates should submit
be offered to the best shortlisted candidates. Interested
(Executive Office) - F 2 posts in related technical
watering the region. Ex: being able to travel,
necessary documents to mrcshrrecruitment@solitarioes.com.
with excellent spoken & written English &
and learning their skills. Able to use MS
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LOS ANGELES – US athletes were quick to denounce the Connecticut school massacre, but a string of shootings involving star players indicates that many are avid gun owners who pack their heat wherever they go.

The shootings have alarmed fans and drawn the wrath of league commissioners like Roger Goodell of the National Football League, trying to crack down on bad behaviour with tougher rules, longer suspensions and increased counselling.

Professional athletes have been known to take guns on team flights, carry them in their cars and even sneak them into their teams’ dressing rooms.

Earlier this month, Kansas City Chiefs linebacker Jovan Belcher used a .40-calibre handgun to kill his girlfriend, Kasandra Perkins, in their home. Belcher then drove to the Chiefs’ Arrowhead Stadium, where he used a different handgun to kill himself in front of the team’s coach Romeo Crennel and general manager Scott Pioli.

The Kansas City Star reported December 17 that Belcher, who unloaded 10 shots into Perkins’s body, had threatened to kill his longtime girlfriend in a text message he sent a couple of weeks earlier to another girlfriend.

Many American sports stars were shaken by the slaughter of 20 young children and six adults allegedly shot by 20-year-old Adam Lanza at a Connecticut elementary school on December 14.

Some, like Tennessee Titans player Chris Johnson, paid tribute to the victims by wearing shoes with the names of the children and their teachers written on them. Professional teams across the US observed a moment of silence before games following the shooting.

But Belcher’s case is not an isolated one. There have been a number of off-field incidents over the years involving US athletes and firearms.

Three years ago, NBA player Delonte West, who was playing for Cleveland at the time, was riding a motorcycle when he was pulled over by police. They found a 9mm handgun in his waistband, a .357 Magnum revolver strapped to his leg and a shotgun hidden in a guitar case slung over his shoulder.

Lito Sheppard, who played for the NFL’s Oakland Raiders last year, reportedly owned around 17 guns, while former NBA star Jayson Williams was showing his gun collection to friends in 2002 when a gun went off accidentally, killing his limo driver Costas Christofi.

NFL player Darrent Williams was shot dead in his limousine outside a Denver nightclub six years ago following an earlier altercation. In 2006, a total of 15 NFL players were arrested on violence-related charges.

Incidents like these have left experts asking whether there is an increased gun culture among athletes, or if they are a reflection of American society as a whole.

Many athletes say they need guns because their celebrity and wealth makes them a target.

The NFL’s personal conduct policy requires players who engage in criminal activity to get a psychological evaluation and, if needed, take anger management courses. Former NFL head coach Tony Dungy said that when he was coaching, he’d always ask at the team’s first teaming of the season, “How many of you guys have guns?”

“I was always shocked at the number of guys who raised their hand. (But) it’s just a fact of life. These guys had them,” he told USA Today earlier this month.

“I think so many of these young guys have been around guns and have seen guns, and they just feel that’s part of the landscape for them growing up.”

America has suffered an epidemic of gun violence over the last three decades, including more than 60 mass shooting incidents since 1982.

The vast majority of weapons used have been semi-automatic handguns or military-style assault weapons obtained legally by the killers.

There were an estimated 310 million non-military firearms in the United States as of 2009, one for each citizen. They are a target.

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There were an estimated 310 million non-military firearms in the United States as of 2009, one for each citizen. People in America are 20 times more likely to be killed by a gun than someone in another developed country.

– AFP
Ye Myat Min given lifetime ban by MFF

By Aung Si Hein

Royal Land FC’s Ye Myat Min has been handed a lifetime ban by the Myanmar Football Federation (MFF) futsal season on December 15, when Royal Land took on ACE FC. The ban was issued on December 19.

In the second half, after falling behind and having one player sent off, Ye Myat Min expressed his frustrations by kicking ACE FC player Aung Lin Maung repeatedly in the neck. At the time he was given a red card.

Defending Champion ACE FC had sealed their position as MFF AYA Futsal League champs with two games remaining in the season by putting an insurmountable seven points between themselves and runner-up Yangon City FC.

Despite already claiming the title, ACE still had to finish off their scheduled matches. They kept true to form with a comfortable drubbing of the hapless Royal Land FC.

The match was thrilling at the start with both sides constantly attacking but it was easy for the experienced ACE FC to outplay Royal Land.

Having clinched the AYA Knockout Cup in July the futsal title is the second of the year for ACE FC, a double they enjoyed last year as well. ACE FC’s dominance has left some futsal fans disappointed by the level of competition in the domestic game.

However, U Tin Maung Htay, ACE head coach, said that futsal players are improving, making it harder to win major tournaments.

“Futsal games are more competitive now because the players from futsal clubs are playing much better than before. The players are more technical and have international experience. We took the time to prepare ourselves throughout the year. This pushed us towards the title. Sometimes our opponents made it difficult during the first half and we knocked them down by exploiting their weak points in the second half,” U Tin Maung Htay said.

ACE pocketed 6 million Ks, while second place Yangon City FC took home half that.

Zin Lin Aung from Linsdown FC was named player of the year’s best player. Pyae Phyo Maung (Pia) of Yangon City FC was the league’s top goal scorer. Yangon City FC received the fair play trophy.

Barcelona coach vows quick return from cancer surgery

Barcelona coach Tito Vilanova faced cancer surgery December 19 and six weeks on the sidelines but vowed he will be in hospital to their best league start ever but salivary gland.

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Barcelona quoted Vilanova as sports newspaper Mundo

“I won’t be away for a while but I will be back soon,” Barcelona coach Jordi Roura would stand in for the time being, acting as coach when the side travels to Valladolid for a league game on December 22.

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