Passengers told of panic and "extreme confusion" after an Air Bagan plane carrying 71 people crashed and caught fire on landing at Heho on December 25, killing two people and injuring 11.

The fatalities were a tour guide identified as Ma Nwe Lin Shein, who was aboard the ageing Fokker-100, and U Pyar, who was riding a motorcycle hit by the plane as it slammed into a road near Heho Airport.

The crash occurred at about 8:51am as the plane, which was also carrying six crew, 48 foreigners and 17 Myanmar nationals, was making a landing approach at the airport on a flight from Mandalay International Airport.

Witnesses said the plane hit powerlines about 1.6 kilometres (one mile) from the runway and then crashed into trees. They said there was heavy fog at the time. The plane caught fire moments after it came to a halt, witnesses said.

Among the survivors was Ms Sabine Hawpel, a journalist from Germany, who said the landing approach initially appeared to be smooth. "Then we realised something was getting wrong and people started to shout and cry and panic," Ms Hawpel told The Myanmar Times.

"Within a few seconds the fire came and the smoke and people were in a panic; we had to get out but there was fire in the back and there was fire in the front," she said, adding that the plane was gutted by the blaze in a few minutes.

Ms Hawpel said most of those who sustained injuries were at the back of the plane. Those who escaped the plane included a man who had suffered burns to his entire body, who was "just lying in the field," she said.

"There was complete confusion, they started to collect us to make a list. Here is a list, there is a list and it was complete confusion," Ms Hawpel said, adding that she thought it was about two hours before a doctor arrived at the scene.

She said the survivors were taken to hall in a village. "Nobody knew what to do and some officials came, police and politicians; there was complete confusion," said Ms Hawpel who was visiting Myanmar for the first time in 25 years.

"I know your country and I love your country, but this was bad luck on one side and on the other hand we were lucky because the whole plane could have exploded and we might not be here now," Ms Hawpel said.

Another survivor, Professor Tavpitz, 59, a German who has piloted small planes, speculated that the flight crew appeared to have been given wrong information for the landing direction.

Professor Tavpitz said there was fog at one end of the runway but the other end was clear, "so from that side there wouldn't be any problem.

"But the plane turned wrong," he said.

The 11 people injured in the crash included four foreigners, the two pilots and a cyclist. They were taken to Sao San Tun Hospital in Taunggyi for treatment before being transferred to Yangon General Hospital.

A tour guide and a man riding a motorcycle are killed when an Air Bagan Fokker-100 crashes while landing near Heho Airport.
An open letter to President Obama

By Tha Tun Khine

EVER since we learnt of your planned visit to our country, we were expecting to see a historic occasion with great enthusiasm and expectation. There were several reasons why you were the first sitting US president to visit Myanmar – we hoped that your visit would push forward the process of democratic reform; we could expect more foreign investment and development; we desired much-needed assistance from your country after the visit; and it signifies a dramatic improvement in foreign relations between the two countries. These hopes of mine are, I believe, shared by the majority of the people.

We have seen, after your forceful speech at Yangon University, that our hopes were not just wishful thinking. Thank you, sir, for all the promises and suggestions you made at the campus for the good of our country. That is, all except one – a very great one, to us.

That great one is a very grave mistake of yours. Your reference to the Bengalis of Rakhine State as Rohingya is, if not an innocent mistake – it is unlikely, as you are the very intelligent leader of a prosperous nation, the most powerful in the world – an indication of neglect to the voice of ethnic Rakhine people. To be lenient.

The ethnic people of Rakhine State include the Maramagyi, Kaman, Mro, and Rakhine – not those Bengalis whom you call as Rohingya. Rakhine people never think of those Bengalis as their ethnic brethren and neither does the Myanmar government.

Mr President, the Rakhine are not the same as the Bengalis of Rakhine State, and they are declared that the British invited those Bengalis from the then state of Bengal (now Bangladesh) in India to work as farm labourers in Rakhine State. The majority of the Bengalis now in Rakhine State are considered illegal immigrants. If you are considerate and sympathetic enough, you can understand our situation very well as you also have a problem with immigrants from Mexico. Can it be said all those illegal immigrants from Mexico and from other places as your citizens on humanitarian grounds?

I do not mean that those Bengalis should not have human rights. Like Mexican illegal immigrants, the Bengalis of Rakhine State have never had human rights – they are human, after all. But there is rule of law in your country and in our country as well. We cannot ignore this. We have a citizenship law. Whether the people are citizens or not should be decided according to this law.

We Rakhine have never maltreated those Bengalis living in Rakhine State and there never was and never is discrimination against them on any grounds, be it religion or colour or race or something else. Their mosques are everywhere in Rakhine State; there are more than 300 mosques in the small township of Maungdaw alone. There are also many mosques and Muslims all over Myanmar. We have Muslim teachers and friends whom we love and respect.

Religion is not the main problem of the conflict. It is evident by the fact that Rakhine people have tolerated the presence of Muslims in our land for years.

The ensuing conflict has caused great losses in terms of lives of both sides. It is an undeniable fact confirmed by their features, language, complexion, dress, culture and religion. Rohingya is the name given to them not long ago by some unscrupulous Bengalis on the advice of some extremists and terrorists with the aim of claiming undeserved rights. Mr President, the Rakhine are not a minority ethnic group, simple and poor. We are in danger of drowning under the huge wave of Bengali intruders.

According to the British census of 1891 there were only 58,255 Muslims in Rakhine State. That may even include ethnic Kaman Muslims. But now there are 1.5 million Muslims, mostly Bengalis. The population cannot increase that much in such a short amount of time naturally; it is a sure sign of illegal immigration. More than 200 Rakhine villages in the border areas have now disappeared because of this immigration.

The origin of the Bengalis in Rakhine State who can guarantee they won't do that?

Anyway, let’s face the reality. Bengalis are living in Rakhine State. There are also ethnic Rakhine. They are now agitated and finding it hard to live together. Rakhine people don’t want to live together with them now. Rakhine are the host. Bengalis are the guest, albeit uninvited. Please don’t forget this fact, Mr President. Guests must respect their host. This is universally accepted. How did this conflict start? Because of the breach of this custom by the guest, Mr President: a very ugly and cruel act committed by Bangladesh against an innocent Rakhine girl.

The ensuing conflict has caused great losses in terms of both lives and properties on both sides. It cannot be settled just by saying, let’s be benign to be benignes. As long as they live together a new conflict can arise any day, a fact you alluded to in your speech at the university. Showing love and magnanimity after such a savage conflict is difficult for all people involved.

All those who criticise the government on this matter in favour of those Bengalis must also share the burden. Britain must also share as she is the country must responsible for this problem.

Excuse me, Mr President, if my words are a little stinging. I would like to take your mistake as bima fide, but at the same time remind you of the saying: “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.”

(The author is a Rakhine national living in Yangon.)
**Tachileik land grab has links to president**

By Noe Noe Aung

**THE head of a former people's militia, or pithay sitt, is embroiled in a dispute with villagers in eastern Shan State's Tachileik township over 325 acres of land with links to President U Thein Sein's tenure as commander of Triangle Region Command.**

U Chit Win, a Yangon resident who is representing 28 people involved in the land dispute, said authorities in Lwelsatone village and the Shan State Peace and Development Council divided and sold the land to the villagers in 2005.

"Many villagers bought land there. But in 2010 a man called U Ko Oo said that he is the owner of the land. In October 2012 he broke the fences down, built a house and also built a road across the land," U Chit Win said.

**When The Myanmar Times contacted U Ko Oo in Tachileik, he refused to comment and said he did not believe he was speaking to a journalist.**

U Chit Win said U Ko Oo had built the house against the orders of Tachileik township General Administrative Office.

"When the villagers reported about this to the township authorities, they issued an order not to do anything on the land. But U Ko Oo didn’t obey it," he said.

U Chit Win said U Ko Oo and U Ar Hoo, who was also a member of the pithay sitt, applied for and were given permission to cultivate 55 acres and 800 acres respectively on the land in 1999. Permission was granted when President U Thein Sein served as commander of Triangle Region Command, U Chit Win said.

After U Ar Hoo, the leader of the Tachileik pithay sitt, passed away and U Ko Oo left the area, leaving the land empty, the village authorities, township General Administration Department and township surveying department formed a commission and surveyed the land. The Shan State Peace and Development Council divided and sold the land to villagers under the instruction of the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2005, U Chit Win said.

"There was no objection at that time. But in 2010, U Ko Oo came with the photo of himself, U Thein Sein and three other people and said that he owned the land and that [U Thein Sein] gave the land to him. And he also showed a letter giving him permission to cultivate from 1999. Earlier this year he built a house and a road on the land, ignoring the objections of villagers and township authorities," he said.

"Now he is acting like he got all 325 acres in 1999. We reported the dispute to the president. All of the villagers are waiting for a response,” he added.

**After decades muzzling media, Myanmar to allow private dailies**

**MYANMAR will allow private daily newspapers from April next year, the government announced on December 28, a big leap forward for a country that had barely any press freedom under its decades of military dictatorship.**

Before the military seized power in a 1962 coup, there were more than a dozen local private dailies in multiple languages. At present, only state-controlled newspapers, mostly considered dull, propaganda-filled mouthpieces of the government, are allowed to publish on a daily basis.

The decision comes as part of an astonishing relaxation of laws governing the media in Myanmar, among the most dramatic reforms introduced by Thein Sein’s quasi-civilian government since it came to power 19 months ago.

The regime it replaced had barely any press freedom. Despite the changes, a degree of self-censorship is expected to remain as long as Orwellian laws like the Electronic Transaction Law exist, which threatens jail terms of 15 years for revealing "state secrets." That term has been applied loosely and at one point it included references by journalists to the amount of money in circulation in Myanmar.

Veteran journalist Pho Thanu Kyaw, a member of an interim Press Council appointed to draw up a new media law, said daily-independent papers would be a new thing for most Burmese.

"Will have to reintroduce the people to the taste of independent private dailies," he said. – Reuters

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President U Thein Sein, then the commander of Triangle Region Command, with U Ko Oo. Pic: Supplied

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Public is ‘waiting to see what the NLD can do for them: MP’

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

DAW Phyu Phyu Thin was one of 43 members of the National League for Democracy elected in the April 1, 2012, by-election to serve in parliament. She now represents Yangon’s Mingalar Taung Nyunt township in the Pyithu Hluttaw.

From page 1

Th Heb Htoo told a news conference at Yangon’s Kandawgyi Palace Hotel on December 26 that the aircraft was airworthy and had been maintained in accordance with the approved schedules of the manufacturer, by qualified aircraft engineers. U Thet Htoo said both pilots were fully qualified and were sent regularly for simulator training and their licences and proficiency checks were current.

“Pilots always follow standard operating procedures,” he said.

The Department of Civil Aviation has established a special member team headed by Deputy Director-General U Win Swe Tun on December 26 to investigate the cause of the accident.

In a telephone interview with The Myanmar Times from Heho on December 26, U Win Saw Tun said the plane’s flight recorder had been found and would be sent to Singapore for analysis to help determine the cause of the crash.

The director of Air Bagan’s engineering department, U U Tin, said: ‘The evidence that the crash would be announced after the flight recorder was analysed.

He also said the airline was doing everything necessary to assist the passengers.

The charred remains of the motorbike ridden by a man named as U Pyar, who was killed when the Air Bagan crashed on landing near Heho Airport.

By Daw Phyu Phyu Thin campaigns in Mingalar Taung Nyunt township during the lead-up to the April 1, 2012, by-elections.

Aung San Suu Kyi after every hluttaw session talk to current issues. Dau Suu encourages us to not only to spend time in the hluttaw, but also to get out and meet with the people we represent. She also told us that, if possible, we should not bringing everything back to the hluttaw but we should try to solve these issues ourselves, especially complaints about crime and macro-related issues. We also meet with officials from government offices after the hluttaw sessions to solve the people’s issues, if necessary. And we also meet with the people to explain what is happening in the hluttaw. We can solve most of their problems by working closely with officials, and avoid bringing the issues to the hluttaw. Having said that, in the coming year I will have some questions to bring to the hluttaw.

Most MPs, instead of solving problems themselves, want to take everything to the hluttaw to be dealt with there.

What kind of questions will you take to Nay Pyi Taw during the next session? The Myanmar Times

What kind of questions will you take to Nay Pyi Taw during the next session? They will be related to legal affairs and transportation issues. But we will also be busy with budget issues in the next session because it is the budget season.

What are the weaknesses and strengths of being an MP? For years, we were living under a dictatorship, so we were very far away from the people and take them to the hluttaw? Most MPs, instead of solving problems themselves, want to take everything to the hluttaw to be dealt with there.

What were your experiences serving as a member of parliament (MP) this year? I had observed the hluttaw sessions before I became an MP, and as far as I could tell most people in my area were not interested in the hluttaw before the National League for Democracy (NLD) won seats in the by-election. They didn’t even pay attention to what the politicians in parliament were talking about, but after the NLD got in, their interest grew. This is because they elected NLD members to become MPs, and now they are waiting to see what we can do for them. But their expectations are totally dependent on Aung San Suu Kyi. The people want to see change so they have very high expectations from her.

Ms Suu had this happened? One of the reasons is that there are already a lot of questions and bills before the hluttaw, and even if we don’t raise the questions ourselves we are still involved in the debate sessions. There are also committees to solve specific issues in the hluttaw, so don’t need to ask all of our questions directly in each session.

I noticed that Dr Myat Nyarna Soe, an ex-member of the National Democratic Force who switched to the NLD, was very active and asked many questions in previous sessions, but is now very silent. You also have asked fewer questions in the hluttaw recently. Why has this happened?

The Myanmar Times

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The Myanmar Times
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NGOs step up fight against trafficking

By Bill O’Toole

DOMESTIC and international aid groups have formed partnerships to combat human trafficking in Myanmar and those displaced by conflict are particularly vulnerable because of the difficult conditions in the camps.

The China border [saw a large amount] of human trafficking even before the conflict,” said Ms May Sabe Tu, a coordinator for the Kachin Independence Women’s Peace Network, referring to the fighting between the government and Kachin Independence Army. "But the conflict is triggering a higher volume of women being trafficked across the border.

But the conflict has complicated efforts to combat human trafficking in the region. Many displaced persons – about 39,000 out of 90,000, according to the United Nations – are living in camps in areas controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisation, and the government has for the most part denied the UN and other NGOs direct access to these areas because of security concerns.

In her recent visit to Myanmar, the UN secretary general for humanitarian affairs, Valerie Amos, urged the government and Kachin Independence Organisation, which recently developed its own anti-trafficking legislation, to allow UN and other NGOs direct access to the camps most women are trafficked to.

The Kindness Women’s Group used its new materials at a seminar in the KIO-controlled town of Maiza Yang on December 14. “We will do three days of training,” Ms Nang Pu said ahead of the seminar. “The participants are all women and we will give them numbers they can call in case they become victims of exploitation.

Mr Craig Halmos, the head of the small grants program at the US embassy, said he was not concerned that the embassy does not have direct access to some projects. “In many respects the people that are most savvy are the grants recipients themselves. In the last six years the small grants program has evolved not based on what the US government has pushed onto people but what people have requested from us,” he said. “(Kindness and other groups) are on the ground, they know what is possible.”

Ministry to care for athletes during games

By Yamon Phu Thit

ATHLETES participating in the 27th Southeast Asian Games in Myanmar will receive orthopaedic care from the Ministry of Health and the Myanmar Medical Association in collaboration with a South Korean orthopaedics foundation, an official said last week.

Local orthopaedic specialists in collaboration with the South Korean group Good Shepherd Hospital Foundation will provide care to local and foreign athletes with fractures and muscle injuries during the SEA games, Myanmar Orthopaedics Society president Dr Myint Thaung told The Myanmar Times.

Members of the Orthopaedics Society, which is under the MMA, and specialists from Good Shepherd will be on standby at venues in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Mandalay and Ngwe Saung Beach during the games to provide “on demand” assistance.

“We will do whatever they can,” said Ms May Sabe Tu. “They will do whatever they can,” said Ms May Sabe Tu.

The Chinese government, which recently developed its own anti-trafficking legislation, has not allowed UN and other NGOs direct access to the camps most women are trafficked to.

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MRCS to build shelters for displaced in Rakhine State

By Aye Sapay Phyu

THE Myanmar Red Cross Society plans to build 60 temporary shelters for 600 displaced families in Rakhine State, with construction expected to start in January, an official from the organisation said last week.

U Maung Maung Khin, head of the society’s disaster management division, said the shelters will be built with help from the Qatar Red Crescent Society.

“We plan to build a total of 60 shelters in Rakhine State, each with 10 talk for 10 families. Each shelter will be equipped with three toilets, two manual water tube wells and four water containers,” he said.

“We are waiting for the local government in Rakhine State to decide where the shelters should be located. We expect to start building them in January."

U Maung Maung Khin said shelter, water and sanitation, and health care are among the primary needs of displaced families in the region.

He said MRCS teams have been providing ambulance services for emergency patients, as well as first aid and health care assistance to the public in Sittwe.

“The government is ready to discuss with the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and is willing to listen to their demands through a political dialogue, a top government official told The Myanmar Times.

“We have offered to listen [to the KIO]. We are ready to speak at once when they accept,” said the government’s chief negotiator, Union Minister U Aung Min.

A KIO official confirmed that they received a written request from the government but declined to elaborate further.

Chiang Mai-based new group The Irrawaddy reported on December 20:

A government peace negotiation team and representatives from the KIO met at the Sino-Russian border town of Buli on October 30, where U Aung Min promised a political dialogue in the near future. Although the government has indicated a preference for Bhamo or Muse as the location for negotiations, they said the KIO can choose.

“The government is ready to agree to whatever the KIO asks. If they want us to talk about political issues, we will talk political issues. If they want to talk economic issues, we’ll talk economic issues. If they want to talk social issues, we’ll talk social issues. We’re ready to agree to as much as we can so long as it’s provided for by the framework of the law. We expect we can talk [this month],” U Aung Min said.

James Lan Du, deputy chief of foreign affairs for the KIO, has doubts that the new peace talks offered by the government would help put an end to the year-and-a-half of diplomatic dialogue that has not yielded any lasting agreements, The Irrawaddy reported as saying on December 20.

U Aung Min said that he is pleased with the government’s reconciliation measures with armed ethnic groups in 2012, and anticipates positive results in 2013.

“I expect that 2013 will be the ‘Golden Year’ for Myanmar. Now, we have good relations with all ethnic groups. We are ready to talk with the Kachin and [Kachin] opposition parties. People are now participating in building a democratic state and cooperating with the government to do so. Therefore, it is not impossible to establish peace and develop democratically,” U Aung Min said.

He said he was not able to comment further regarding the current conflict between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and KIO armed groups.

“I haven’t been to [Kachin State], I will come back when I come back,” he said.

The KIA was founded in 1961 as a government opposition group. They signed a cease-fire agreement in 1994 under the military government, but the agreement was reneged in June 2011. Since then, thousands of skirmishes have erupted between the Tatmadaw and the KIA.

The KIA has not signed any agreements with the new government, and heavy fighting has accelerated between the two sides since June 2011.

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ICF’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) 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 #123053)

ICF’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/careers and choose the vacancy number 120086.

Operations Officer, Access to Finance Program (Position #123067)

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Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/careers and choose the vacancy number 120067.

Senior Investment Officer (Position #123067)

ICF 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- and off-site training seminars.

Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/careers and choose the vacancy number 120067.

Country Officer (Position #123067)

This Country Officer is a senior position responsible for developing and maintaining relations 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/careers and choose the vacancy number 120067.

Program Assistant (Position #123053)

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 assigned responsibility for additional tasks, including translating/drafting a variety of standard documents, applying effective Microsoft Office and grammar skills.

Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at http://www.ifc.org/careers and choose the vacancy number 120053.

Interested candidates should apply on-line at http://www.ifc.org/careers 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.
Singapore: shopping, eating and...?

Wealthy Singapore at bottom of happiness league
Gallup global happiness poll puts Singapore last, Philippines first among 148 countries

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A RESCUE facility for turtles and tortoises seized from illegal wildlife traders has opened in Naung Cho township in Shan State, according to a statement posted on the website of the US-based Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), which is providing support for the centre.

The Turtle Rescue Centre (TRC) was dedicated on December 6 at Zeepin Forest Reserve’s Ban Bwe Tree Nursery, about 20 kilometres (18 miles) east of Pyin Oo Lwin.

TSA president Rick Hudson was quoted in the online statement as saying that he hoped the “facility will offer new hope to thousands of turtles and tortoises confiscated from the illegal wildlife trade”.

U Than Myint, the country program director of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), said the centre will be used to care for the endangered turtle species and to prevent the spread of disease to other turtles when the animals are released back into the wild.

“We will separate the common species from the endangered species among the turtles that are sent to the centre. Then they will be supported with food and water, as well as with health care services,” he said.

“We’ve found that some seized turtles had not been given proper food and water for one or two months, and some were injured or suffered from disease. Other turtles in the forest can be affected by diseases passed from sick ones. We will conserve the critically endangered species at the centre, and the common species will be released back into their natural habitat once they become well,” he said.

U Than Myint said the centre’s location along the Mandalay-Lashio Road places it in one of the hotspots along one of the routes used to illegally traffic wild animals from Myanmar to China.

“More rescue centres need to be established along the other trafficking routes to border areas,” he said.

“It will be more convenient for transporting seized turtles if we can establish rescue centres in areas such as Myitkyina in Kachin State and Kawthaung in Taninthayi Region. Otherwise, it will cost a lot of money to send turtles seized in Kawthaung to the rescue centre in Naung Cho,” he said.

According to the TSA website, confiscations of trafficked turtles will be handled by Forest Department staff stationed at the centre, while a TSA and WCS turtle team will provide management, oversight and logistical support. Local veterinary support will be provided by veterinarians from the zoo in Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw, both of which are trained in the care and handling of turtle confiscations.

By Aye Sapay Phyu

Buddhist conference held in Yangon

By Cherry Thein

AN international conference on Buddhist cultural heritage was held at Sitagu International Buddhist University in Yangon from December 15 to 17, with support from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

At the opening ceremony, Myanmar Vice President Dr Sai Maung Khun said the preservation of Myanmar’s Buddhist cultural heritage would help bring peace and reconciliation to the country.

“The Buddha’s teachings on compassion, sympathy, patience and impermanence calm and guide the people. We can fill our physical needs with science and materialism, but our psychological needs can be released by the Buddha’s teachings. They are a priceless heritage for all people,” he said.

The decision to hold the conference in Yangon was made by the governments of Myanmar and India during the state visit of President U Thein Sein to India in October 2011. The plan was confirmed during Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh’s visit to Myanmar last May.

The patron of Sitagu International Buddhist University, Dr Ashin Nyanissara, said the seminar was aimed at maintaining and developing the dignity, culture and spirit of Buddhism in Myanmar and India.

“There are two components to maintaining Buddhist cultural heritage: spiritual and physical,” Dr Ashin Nyanissara said. “The physical heritage includes pagodas, images, religious buildings and mural paintings, while the spiritual side includes preserving the Buddha’s literature and teachings in their purity.”

“We are trying to maintain the spiritual heritage by teaching Buddhist literature and doctrine, while at the same time working to preserve the physical culture heritage,” he said.

The three-day conference included 26 presenters from 10 countries, whose topics ranged from preservation of religious buildings to teaching and literature.

Among the presenters was Dr Hla Tun, associate head of the Pali language and literature department at Pariyati Sasa University in Yangon.

He told The Myanmar Times that the seminar attracted a great deal of interest among people in Myanmar, even though it was the first time that such a gathering had been held in the country.

“Many are maintaining Theravada Buddhism in its original form, along with the relevant literature. The scholars who took part in the conference shared their views and perspectives on Buddhist cultural heritage, which is important for future generations and for the religion,” he said.

Dr Hla Tun said similar events should be held in the future, in collaboration with the government, religious groups and international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

On the evening of December 15, officials from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Sitagu International Buddhist University held a ceremony at Shwedagon Pagoda to dedicate a shrine holding a 4.8-metre (16-foot) sandstone Buddha image donated by India.

On the same evening a stage performance about the life of the Buddha was presented at the National Theatre, organised by the Indian embassy in collaboration with Myanmar’s Ministry of Culture and Sitagu University.
Censorship: a foreigner’s experience

By Geoffrey Goddard

I AM confident I am speaking on behalf of all journalists working in the private sector in Myanmar – and perhaps most of those working for state-run newspapers – when I say that up until August this year censorship has been the curse of our professional lives.

On a personal level my response to censorship has ranged from quiet exasperation to furious contempt. Censorship has been the cause of outbursts in the news room which ranged from anger to amazement. I held up a copy of every story to an MI office and would get a call back to say if a story was rejected or had to be cut. We also had to send A3 copies of every story to an MI office and would get a call back to say if a story was rejected or had to be cut. We also had to send MI to the front page, which was often adjusted under its orders.

After the MI purge we were censored, like all private sector publications, by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), to which we had to send A3 copies of every page. To fill holes caused by stories or pictures being rejected or cut, we had to send what we called alternate stories as backups. It was also necessary to retract a story or on every page after they had been mutilated by the censor. A minor upset of the end of pre-publication censorship in August was no longer having to squander our Saturday nights on tasks that involved a denial of the truth.

The censorship decision that left me most flabbergasted was the ban on running any story about the death of Ne Win in early December 2002. I could not believe that no private sector newspaper was allowed to mention anything about the man who had run the country for 30 years and, many would say, ran it into the ground.

Some censorship decisions were incredibly petty. I remember a travel story about a visit to an old teak monastery far from Yangon which mentioned that it was reached by travelling down a dirt road. We had to remove “dirt.”

Some of the most petty censorship decisions involved mentions of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In May 2002 when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest and gave a news conference at the headquarters of the National League for Democracy, we wrote a 22 paragraph story about the event. It was cut to five paragraphs.

We reported that she arrived at party headquarters “amid cheers from a jubilant crowd of several hundred party members and supporters.” That was deleted and we were instructed to write that she arrived at party headquarters and “met local and international journalists”. In September 2002, a service to commemorate the victims of the September 11 attacks in the US the previous year was held at a Yangon hotel. The Myanmar Times reported that among the 150 people who attended was the leader of the NLD, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We were instructed to delete the reference to her and say that “executive committee members of the NLD were among the audience.”

Some censorship decisions reflected a sensitivity, or perhaps a sentence quoting the US report as accusing the Myanmar government of restricting some religious activities, “an inclusion of churches and mosques.”

Some censorship decisions were a source of amusement. As was a story about an opium crop substitution project in northern Thailand. One censorship decision, in late 2001, resonates with the situation today in Rakhine State.

It was about Myanmar’s response to the annual report issued by the US about religious freedom around the world.

It quoted a senior Foreign Ministry official as saying that Myanmar should be regarded as a model society when it came to religious freedom and tolerance. Cut from the story was a paragraph about what US officials had said in the report.

By the time I left Myanmar after the Tiananmen massacre, I had spent 10 years working in the private sector and had accepted a position with The Myanmar Times in June 2001, so

PHOTO: Boothee

CORRECTION: December 31 - January 6, 2013

I was sentenced to 14 years’ jail in November since he was following year. It was eight years in November since he was

Taking the building capacity in the media sector, even if only a small one, was very satisfying. Pic: Supplied

Some censorship decisions reflected a sensitivity, or perhaps even embarrassment, about how much more advanced were neighboring countries or how much more successful at dealing with social problems. A feature story about the opening of the Bangkok Skytrain was banned.

The Myanmar Times was censored by Military Intelligence until it was purged in October 2004. We had to fax a copy of every story to an MI office and would get a call back to say if a story was rejected or had to be cut. We also had to send MI an A3 front page, which was often adjusted under its orders.

of the provisions under the 2008 constitution.

The proposal, signed by 162 MPs, was proposed by U Zaw Win Ko Ko Latt, the MP for a government radio station in Australia.

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Heritage trust got it wrong: Pansodan building owners

By Htar Htar Khin

THE owners of apartments in a Pansodan Street building on which demolition work was halted after a media campaign have challenged statements by heritage activists that the building was a dangerous structure.

Workers began demolishing the upper levels of the four-story building at 233-235 Pansodan Street in October after it was declared a dangerous structure by the Yangon City Development Committee.

The four owners, whose apartments each covered a floor of the building, were warned by the YCDC in September.

The site's developer, United Construction Company, planned to build a 12-story condominium on the site and the four owners said it had agreed to provide them with an apartment on the same level as the residence they had vacated.

The owners last week condemned the decision to halt the demolition work, saying that not knowing whether they would be causeing unnecessary suffering and could result in unexpected expense.

"We've suffered a lot because of the decision to halt the demolition work," said Daw Tin Tin San, 35, the ground floor apartment owner.

She said the rear of the building had suffered serious structural damage because of water leakage and the YCDC had been justified to impose the demolition order.

"We want to ask is can anyone produce the evidence that proves this building is an historic icon," she said.

Her concerns were echoed by the owner of the third floor apartment, U Zaw Tin, 53, who said claims made about the building by the Yangon Heritage Trust were "quite misleading", because it had no connection with the Dobama Asiayone.

"I think U Thant Myint-U from the Yangon Heritage Trust has confused the building at 233-235 Pansodan with 237-239 Pansodan Street," he said.

U Zaw Tin said 233-235 Pansodan Street was originally a maternity hospital, which had occupied all four floors.

"I was born there in 1959 and the building had no connection with the Dobama Asiayone or any political organisation," he said.

UK to provide aid to Kachin refugees

By Justin Heifetz

The United Kingdom will provide £2.25 million in humanitarian aid to those displaced by violence in Kachin State, a British government official announced on December 21.

"We must act now to relieve the immediate suffering and to ensure the conditions do not worsen to cause further long-term hardship," said Justine Greening, the UK's secretary of state for international development, in comments to The Myanmar Times.

In a response last week to the concerns raised by the apartment owners, Dr Thant Myint-U said the demolition order the YCDC had put on the building was based on the assessment that the building was a dangerous structure.

"We have already moved out of the building and it cannot be demolished but will pay for what would be a major renovation," he said.

"Will the government pay for our expenses?" said Daw Tin Tin San.

"It's like waiting for an endless future," she said.

"We must act now to relieve the immediate suffering and to ensure the conditions do not worsen," said Justine Greening, the UK's secretary of state for international development, in comments to The Myanmar Times.

"It's quite misleading", because it had no connection with the Dobama Asiayone.

In comments to The Myanmar Times in early December, Yangon Heritage Trust chairman Dr Thant Myint-U said it would be a "tragedy" if the building was destroyed adding that it had been used as a meeting place for the Dobama Asiayone in the 1930s.

The site's developer, United Construction Company, planned to build a 12-story condominium on the site and the four owners said it had agreed to provide them with an apartment on the same level as the residence they had vacated.

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"I was born there in 1959 and the building had no connection with the Dobama Asiayone or any political organisation," he said.

The UK is stepping up to help, but I call on all donors to do more for the people of Kachin, and on all parties to ensure access for humanitarian agencies," she added.

According to the DFID's official press release, the UK support delivered via Trocaire over the next five months will provide nearly 16,000 people with basic food rations; almost 22,000 people with US$7.55 cash grants each, for meat and vegetables or the equivalent in cooked meals and basic hygiene support; and 1300 people with sufficient shelter.

The support also aims to provide 800 children with access to "safe areas"; psycho-social support to 5000; and more than 120 health professionals and local staff from 15 Kachin organisations to be dispatched to provide humanitarian support at an international standard.

Trocaire has been working in the region with a local faith-based organisation, Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS), to provide humanitarian assistance since the beginning of the conflict in June 2011, and with DFID funding since January 2012.

The DFID's call for support comes amid reports of looming shortages in food supplies in Kachin Independence Army (KIA) controlled areas, according to the press release.

The current package of DFID support is worth about $2.5 million, which takes the total DFID allocation to the Kachin conflict to about $5.6 million, the press release said.

A worker deconstructs the building at 233-235 Pansodan Street in October, before demolition was halted following a media campaign by heritage activists. Pic: Boothee
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Nippon Foundation sends aid to conflict areas

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

THE Nippon Foundation of Japan has implemented a US$3 million humanitarian aid project in Myanmar, aimed at providing relief for refugees living in areas controlled by armed ethnic groups.

The program will be run under the framework of an agreement between the Myanmar government and a grouping of ethnic organisations called the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC).

U Aung Min, chairman of the UNFC, said: “Social Enterprise is a business environment, nature of social enterprise, social profit, business models and impact assessment. The applications for the February 17 competition are expected to write a business proposal, and will be divided into eight groups. Each group will be offered US$10,000, with additional $1000 for the first prize winner, $500 for the second prize Foundation and $300 for the third. Those interested in the competition should contact the Nippon Foundation chairman Yohei Sasakawa; and other officials.

“It is unprecedented that such a large aid package is to be given to the armed forces of a minority group, while undertaking social activities, and combining the pros of both business and social work,” U Myo Min explained to The Myanmar Times.

The supplies included 50 tonnes of rice, medical supplies for hospitals and 500 boxes of traditional medicine.

The two-day workshop will be taught on 23 and 30 December from 9am to 5pm. Applicants are limited to 100 people, and must be between the ages of 18 and 30 years. The fee for the class is K10,000 and 10 candidates will be selected to compete for the scholarship.

Subjects to be taught include presentation skills, business environment, nature of social enterprise, social profit, business models and impact assessment. The applicants for the February 17 competition are expected to write a business proposal, and will be divided into eight groups. Each group will be offered US$10,000, with additional $1000 for the first prize winner, $500 for the second prize Foundation and $300 for the third. Those interested in the competition should contact the Nippon Foundation chairman Yohei Sasakawa; and other officials.

The ceremony was attended by Minister U Aung Min from the President’s Office, PS Business School, which is organizing the competition, National Union Federation of Myanmar, National League of Karenni, and Karen National Union.

The project was launched at a ceremony held in Mawlamyine, Mon State, on December 22, during which representatives from the foundation gave US$70,000 worth of emergency supplies (NMSP), to the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

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The fiscal year in review: 2012 - 2013

The easing of sanctions has benefit Myanmar’s economy, but experts say there are many challenges ahead.

By Aye Thidar Kyaw

The government’s efforts to reform the long-dormant economy and tackle endemic poverty through 2011 and 2012 have failed to reach the intended targets, sources said last week.

Since the new government took power in March 2011, the government has swiftly liberalised the economy by cutting red tape for import/export businesses, allowed domestic banks to open automatic teller machines and partied with foreign lenders to offer international transfers, opened the car and cooking oil import markets, enacted an amended foreign investment law and repeatedly invited foreign investment.

At the same time, it has strengthened democratic principles and allowed its people to voice opposition to major projects such as the Myitsone dam in Kachin State and more recently the Letpadang copper mine in Monywa, in Sagaing Region.

The international community has taken note, as witnessed by United Nations Secretary General visiting the country on November 19, and the gradual easing of economic sanctions through 2012. Huge American companies, such as General Electric, PepsiCo and Coca-Cola, have responded to the easing of sanctions by entering the country in search of profit.

In late 2012, to a casual observer it might appear that the changes have been rapid and vast. But economic experts within the country say many of the alterations have only been on paper, and have not affected the majority, especially the farmers living in rural areas who make up most of the population.

Local economists say the government spent considerable effort and time in 2012 fighting corruption and a lack of transparency, increasing the accountability of bureaucrats, reducing cronyism and fighting illegal trade.

Emphasis has also been placed on fixing hardware problems though commissioning better transportation systems, telecommunication networks and improving electricity distribution. In these efforts the government has sought, and been provided, technical assistance from international institutions.

However, the increased international attention on Myanmar’s economy has also had strongly negative impacts on the tourism and property sectors, local economists and experts said this year.

Rental rates for hotel rooms, as well as prime residential and office spaces, have skyrocketed, catapulting Yangon to 35th on international ratings of expats index, released in June 2012.

In April, the Central Bank of Myanmar finally axed its pegged rate for the national currency and replaced it with a manage floatation set via daily currency auctions with private banks. The move saw the much-ridiculed K6-to-the-dollar exchange rate replaced by a market rate, which was K845 last week. The flotation is part of a broader plan being implemented with advice provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to unify the different exchange rates available in the country, which the fund previously estimated to number more than 15.

Foreign economists said Myanmar’s economy cannot realistically grow further until its banking sector is modernised, and for that to happen the Central Bank needs to be made independent. Additionally, private banks must boost their loan and capital portfolios to extend more credit to businesses and farmers.

Dr Sean Turnell, an associate professor of economics at Australia’s Macquarie University, said Myanmar’s economy will have grown in 2012 at slightly higher rate than previous years, with energy, precious stones, and resource exports the primary drivers. He added that tourism will also have contributed a significant boost over past years.

But Dr Turnell said the effects of the economic reforms will be slight. “Such reforms are still in their very early stages, and to some extent are just necessary steps to other reforms that could become the real drivers of transformational growth,” he said. “But the latter are not yet in place.”

He added that there are many small measures that can be taken to deliver quick benefits and swing popular support behind an economic reform program. These include removing some restrictions on banks that disallow them...
VISA’s service moves too fast for partner

Mr Peter Maher during a press release at the Sedona Hotel in Yangon earlier this year to announce Visa’s partners in Myanmar. Pic: Thai Lu

By Justin Helfelt

VISA cards are accepted at 50 automatic teller machines operated by Co-operative Bank and Kanbawzathadi Bank throughout the country, Visa Inc said.

But while KBZ reports 120 ATMs that accept Visa on December 26, Visa cardholders could access cash in Yangon and at other major tourist destinations, covered by CB and KBZ banks’ combined Visa ATN network, Visa said.

For all Visa withdrawals in Myanmar, the transaction fee set at $5000. A cardholder can withdraw up to $24000 (100000 kyats) per transaction. By joining the VisaNet, KBZ and CB have agreed to Visa’s financial and security standards for electronic payment, Visa said.

VISA’s services in Myanmar have come earlier than it expected. Mr Peter Maher, Visa’s group country manager for Southeast Asia and Australasia, has initially outlined plans for services in early 2013, telling The Wall Street Journal that there might be delays in readying banks for the technology necessary to process electronic payments.

“In all my meetings in Yangon, lights were going on and off and the air-conditioning was going on and off,” Mr Maher told The Wall Street Journal as late as “This is Myanmar, everyone is doing things for the first time.”

CB has 90 automatic teller machines operated by Co-operative Bank and Kanbawzathadi Bank throughout the country, Visa Inc said.

But investors still complain about the country’s reluctance to liberalize property lending, and poor transportation and telecom services. We need to upgrade [these sectors], and not move backwards and away from foreign investment,” he added.

“With MasterCard, we are 90 percent okay, but with Visa we are not,” he explained that CB cannot tell the cardholder what their current balance is. “On our side, we cannot see the [account holder’s] balance on the screen of the ATM,” Mr Pe Myint said.

“We’ve contacted Visa to make repairs. With MasterCard, we are 90 percent okay, but with Visa we are not,” he added.

There have been a lot of complaints from the customers that they cannot withdraw money from the ATM. “We’ve explained the consequence and we have a call centre for customers with questions. Meanwhile, KBZ’s general manager U Zaw Lin Htut told The Myanmar Times they have not experienced any technical problems or technical issues since they launched their ATMs that accept Visa on December 25.

KBZ has 37 ATMs that accept Visa nationwide, 26 of which are in Yangon, according to U Zaw Lin Htut.
IN a year when many of its overseas investment-banking rivals are cutting jobs in response to dwindling profits, Malaysia’s largest lender is grappling with the opposite problem.

“Our guys are working flat out,” said Tengku Zafrul, Tengku Abdul Aziz, chief executive officer of Malaysia’s largest lender, the Maybank Group, in an interview in Singapore. “To grow further, we need to grow faster. For the number of deals we’re doing, the kind of expansion plans we have, we need to have people.”

Maybank, as the bank is known, and local competitor CIMB Group Holdings Bhd (CIMB) are riding a surge in mergers and stock sales in Southeast Asia, a region spanning the Philippines to Thailand. Adding headcount and acquiring competitors, their ambition is to grow into regional investment-banking powerhouses to compete in Asia with the likes of Goldman Sachs Group Inc (GS) and Morgan Stanley (MS).

In the past four years, in April 2011, the lender bought a unit of a stake in China’s second-largest insurer by another $2 billion this year, close to the region’s top-ranked stock underwriter over the past four years, in April.

Wall Street beaten as Southeast Asia opens door for Malaysian banks

By Joyce Koh

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Japan’s biggest bank buys stake in VN lender

HANOI – Japan’s biggest bank Mitsubishi UFJ last week bought a 20 percent stake worth US$743 million in state-owned VietinBank, the largest foreign investment in Vietnam’s banking sector. The acquisition is aimed at boosting support for Japanese companies operating in Vietnam.

“Mitsubishi UFJ president Nobuyuki Hirano said on December 27, and to tap Southeast Asian markets after seeing its profits tumble this year.

The Japanese bank in November reported that profit in the six months to September dived 58pc year-on-year to $1.6 billion, due partly to declines in VietinBank, or Vietnam Joint Stock Commercial Bank for Industry and Trade, said the majority of its shares will still be owned by the State Bank of Vietnam, but it described the deal as “the largest ever M&A (mergers and acquisitions) transaction” in Vietnam’s banking sector.

After a decade of rapid and chaotic bank liberalisation, Vietnam has 42 domestic banks. Many are overloaded with debt, much of it held by inefficient and poorly-managed state-owned companies.

Analysis stresses the need to woo more foreign players into the banking sector to inject new cash and better management.

Earlier in December, Moody’s downgraded Vietnam’s outlook from “B1” to “B2”, citing weaknesses in the banking system that may hit medium-term growth on the back of a costly government banking bailout.

AFP

Vietnam’s rulers embrace past as complaints rise over present

By Cat Barton

HANOI – Posters of US bombers crashing in flames festoon Hanoi to mark another anniversary of a long-finished war. But behind the usual propaganda Vietnam’s rulers face a modern-day threat – anger over the economy.

For the leaders of the one-party state, the punctilious leaders of the one-party state have learnt on war-era nostalgia to shore up authority anchored in battlefield victories.

With the state-dominated economy floundering, experts say touting decades-old military successes is no longer enough to shield the regime from growing public frustration.

“The communist party is skating on thin ice,” said David Koh, a Vietnam analyst from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

“They must expect new generations to look beyond these great moments of the past in deciding whether their political system is worth supporting.”

A key way to strengthen the party’s legitimacy would be through serious economic reforms, Koh told AFP.

Despite tight controls over the media there are signs of rising public dissatisfaction – from a growing chorus of online criticism to daily, if small-scale, protests.

“The government should spend less time and money on celebrating historic events and pay more attention to improving people’s lives,” said retired state official and ex-soldier Tran Van Duong, 65.

“Everyone seemed to earn less this year, everyone is complaining. People are not happy with the government’s performance,” he said on December 23, as the city marked the 40th anniversary of the US Christmas bombing campaign looms over motorcyclists at an intersection in downtown Hanoi on December 21. Vietnam’s economy is floundering and in need of serious economic reform, say experts. Pic: AFP

“Can’t run a country like this. It is sclerotic,” said Adam Fforde, a professorial fellow at the Centre for Strategic Economic Studies at Victoria University in Melbourne.

“People have lost confidence in the state apparatus is in a bit of a stupor,” said Jonathan London, an associate professor in the Department of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong.

Despite being a one-party state, Vietnam has “an extremely fragmented power structure” within its vast communist apparatus, which seems aware of the problems – at a plenum in Hanoi ministerial officials were admitted in the membership of the economy but no officials to run aground – its banking system drowning in toxic debts, foreign direct investment down sharply

“The formal political system doesn’t work... You can’t run a country like this. It is sclerotic,” London said.

Vietnam needs leaders who can stop powerful interest groups – from the military to the major state-owned enterprises down to provincial officials – running amok, in order to get the economy back on track, London said.

“It is not clear who is capable of doing such a thing,” he said.

Instead, Vietnam is stuck with “a sort of corrupt, patrimonial style of rule that leads to Bentleys and Rolls-Royces on the one hand and tens of millions of people who are doing so well on the other”, London said.

The communist party itself seems aware of the problems – at a plenum in November ministerial officials were admitted in the membership of the economy but no officials to run aground – its banking system drowning in toxic debts, foreign direct investment down sharply

A big poster marking the 40th anniversary of the US Christmas bombing campaign looms over motorcyclists at an intersection in downtown Hanoi on December 21. Vietnam’s economy is floundering and in need of serious economic reform, say experts. Pic: AFP

South Korean finance ministry cuts growth outlook

SEOUL – The South Korean government last week slashed the nation’s growth outlook for 2012 and 2013.

Recessions on the eurozone maintenance, the government repeatedly blamed global demand and uncertainty as the partial economic recovery, the finance ministry revised its earlier estimate of 4.0 percent growth in 2013 to 3.6pc and the 2012 estimate from 3.5pc to 2.1pc.

“The economy continues to slow, as global demand dragged down by prolonged eurozone crisis and lingering uncertainty dampen sentiment,” the ministry said in a statement on December 27.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy’s report the outlook for 2013, but will “slightly improve” in the last half when its major markets are expected to show signs of recovery, it added.

Exports account for about a half of the South’s economy and have been pummeled recently by a general slowdown in developed countries. But the ministry predicted overseas shipments of cars, mobile gadgets and other products and services would increase 4.3pc in 2013 after shrinking 1.3pc in 2012.

Imports will increase 4.6pc in 2013, the ministry added, amounting to an annual current account surplus of about US$30 billion, down from this year’s estimate of US$42 billion.

Consumer prices are expected to rise 2.7pc in 2013, faster than this year’s 2.2pc but within the central bank’s target range of between 2.5 and 3.5pc.
Toyota agrees to $1.1b deal for US recalls

CHICAGO – Toyota has agreed to pay about US$1.1 billion to settle a class action lawsuit launched by US vehicle owners affected by a series of mass recalls, the Japanese automaker said on December 26.

Toyota did not accept any blame but agreed to compensate owners who argued that the value of about 16.3 million vehicles was affected by dozens of deadly accidents allegedly caused by Toyota vehicles speeding out of control in 2009.

The deal will cover the cost of installing a free brake override system in about 2.7 million vehicles.

It will also provide cash payments to those who sold their vehicles in the wake of the recalls or who own vehicles ineligible for the override system.

Once lauded for its safety standards, Toyota was forced into damage control mode in recent years after recalling millions of vehicles over a series of serious defects.

Earlier this year it added two models to the controversial 2009-2010 recalls launched after it was discovered that floor mats were trapping the accelerator pedals.

Toyota’s mishandling of the initial problem and other reports of sudden, unintended acceleration led to an US congressional probe, more than $50 million in fines from US regulators and public apologies by its chief.

Just two weeks ago, the company agreed to pay a record $17.35 million fine for failing to promptly notify US authorities that the floor mats could also be trapped under the accelerators of 2010 Lexus models.

And in November, Toyota agreed to pay $25.5 million to settle claims from shareholders who lost money after the Japanese automaker’s stock price plummeted in the wake of the recalls.

Toyota has worked hard to regain its reputation for safety, while at the same time fighting off the impact of the economic crisis, a strong yen and the devastating 2011 quake-tsunami disaster.

The settlement helps Toyota avoid a lengthy and risky court battle with angry owners who also argued that Toyota’s technology – not the trapped floormats – was behind the deadly instances of sudden, unintended acceleration.

Earlier on December 26, Toyota forecast a 22 percent jump in worldwide sales in 2013, up two percent on-year.

It finished the year strongly after recovering to a degree as if the tsunami disaster.

Toyota did not accept any blame but agreed to

© AFP

Another hazardous year looms for euro

BRUSSELS – The battered euro, written off as a dud many times during a crisis-wrecked year, appears to have survived 2012 but 2013 could prove just as difficult if the economy continues to struggle.

It finished the year strongly after the 17 eurozone nations in December agreed to deal for supply long-delayed bailout funds to Greece to keep the country afloat, and the bloc intact.

Athens in turn delivered on its part of the bargain – more stringent austerity, economic reforms and a tight budget – all with the aim of cutting its massive debt burden to a more sustainable 124 percent of GDP by 2020.

Progress towards tighter economic and fiscal coordination in the eurozone, and a key first step towards a shared bank supervision regime, rounded out the gains, leaving Europe in much better shape than seemed likely at the beginning of the year.

For many months, all analysts could talk about was Greece’s likely exit from the eurozone and what it would mean for the bloc’s future.

Now, “the likelihood of a member state leaving the eurozone is gone,” said Janis Emmanouilidis of the European Policy Centre (EPC) think-tank.

Reflecting the change, Standard and Poor’s raised Greece’s sovereign debt rating by a massive six notches because of what it termed the “strong determination of ... (eurozone) member states to preserve Greek membership.”

Analysts also highlighted agreement on the eurozone’s Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) to regulate its banks, a first step in ring-fencing lenders who get into trouble and threaten financial disaster.

Perhaps the key breakthrough, giving purpose and backing to the other reforms, was a commitment by European Central Bank head Mario Draghi to do anything necessary to save the euro.

In September, Draghi said the ECB would buy up the sovereign debt of any eurozone member state without limit, if that is what it took to keep the financial markets in check.

The immediate result was a sharp easing in borrowing costs, especially for Spain and Italy which had been tipped to follow Greece, Ireland and Portugal in needing a bailout.

That change, backed up a 100 billion euros eurozone lifeline for its banks, allowed the Spanish government to hold the line.

By year-end, few were talking of Madrid as the next debt crisis casualty.

Some analysts said it was important not to get too carried away, however.

The outlook for the next two years “looks less unsettled and will be concerned above all with implementing the new supervisory regime and winding up mechanism for the banks,” CM-CIC Securities analysts said in a note. – AFP
MDY property market to remain unstable

By Phyo Wai Kyaw

The property market in Mandalay is on the decline and is expected to lag again in 2013 from high prices and a lack of buyer interest in the city’s outskirts, property brokers said last week.

Property prices in Mandalay’s undeveloped areas on the outskirts of the city, particularly in Chammyatharsi and Pyin Oo Lwin townships, had doubled or even tripled in late 2011. Experienced brokers described the price boom as an “unnatural market”.

About two months after the boom, the property market remained steady until late July 2012. Some property soared to K10-50 million for a 2400 square foot lot on Mandalay’s outskirts, meanwhile, prices downtown remained steady as it continued to develop and attract demand.

“It is rare to see buyers in the market for property in both the outskirts and downtown area. The market in the outskirts has been affected by the issues (the Union Development Committee) has had with trespassers, so people are reluctant to buy property there. I think this situation with the property market will continue into 2013. It will take a long time for Mandalay’s property market to boom,” broker U Khin Maung Than, from Hin Paw Estate Agency in Myo Thit, said.

Freelance broker U Aung Win said that Mandalay’s unusual property market is the result of buyers purchasing large amounts of land on the outskirts before the spike in 2011, and then selling it for a high profit.

After, he said, many other property-owners followed suit and left Mandalay’s property market.

“The situation happened once in 2007, but when it happened in 2011, it made the market much worse than before,” he said. U Aung Win added that investors should work to cool Mandalay’s property market if they are looking to make a profit on property in the outskirts.

U Thant Zaw Lin, from Pwint Lwin Estate Agency in Pyin Oo Lwin township, said the market could stabilise again if property prices on the outskirts cool.

“Good places are hard to sell, and owners don’t want to sell their property by reducing prices for their plots,” he said.

In August 2012, the government increased the property purchase tax from 15 percent to 30pc; if the buyer cannot provide proof of income, the government will add another 3pc.

Shwe Taung announces plans for mega office complexes

By Htar Htar Khin

In another boost to Yangon’s business infrastructure as the country awaits a further influx of foreign investment, Shwe Taung Development Company is pressing forward with two new office-block complexes.

The Shwe Taung International Commercial Centre (SICC), at the intersection of Mahabandoola and Theinphyu Roads in downtown Yangon is already 70 percent leased, the company says.

The second, the Union Business Centre, will be on Natmauk Road within the cool Mandalay’s property market if they are looking to make a profit on property in the outskirts.

The projected Union Business Centre will comprise one five-storey, 6000-square-metre building with two two-storey annexes with more than 500 square metres each, offering a total of some 90 parking spaces. Mr Yip said prospective tenants included Japan-based companies, representative offices and small and medium enterprises.

Both the SICC and the Union Business Centre were designed by the Singapore-based P&T Architects. SICC tower is slated for completion in January 2014, and the Union Business Centre is expected to be completed next June, he said.

Yangon’s Aung Mingalar highway station to get upgrade

By Noe Noe Aung

THE Yangon City Development Committee has announced a two-year plan to upgrade the Aung Mingalar highway bus station, a city official announced last week.

“The first stage of our plan is to improve the highway station. After that, we will upgrade the highway station to international standards,” said U Nyan Tun Aung, a YCDC official.

The station is not formed very well, because Aung Mingalar used to be a big market. The government transformed it to a highway station later,” he said. U Nyan Tun Aung said that the YCDC is repairing the roads to the highway and building a bus-arrival stand as their first priority.

“Normally, passengers experience difficulty during the rainy season. Therefore, we are planning to build a bus station and we will make some driveways for taxis. This can solve the problems between passenger traffic and taxi traffic,” he said.

He said that the bus station should be complete within six months; at least 50 highway buses will be able to park at the station simultaneously.

“There are a total of 20 roads in the station compound. We are repairing them one-by-one. Seventeen of the roads will be built with concrete and three with tar. We will make some vinyl signboards for direction,” he said.

U Nyan Tun Aung added that the YCDC will find an investor for a build-operate-transfer (BOT) concession contract for the second phase of the upgrade.

“For our later plans, we will announce them when we finish our first priority,” he said.

U Nyan Tun Aung said the YCDC could not disclose the budget on the project.
Housing recovery strengthens in US

By Michael Fletcher

WASHINGTON – Home prices in the United States saw solid gains during the past year, said a report on December 26, adding to the evidence that the housing market turned a corner in 2012, even in the hardest-hit parts of the country.

Nationally, home prices rose 4.3 percent in the 12 months ending in October, a rate that surpassed analysts’ expectations, showed Standard & Poor’s Case-Shiller home-price indexes.

“It is clear that the housing recovery is gathering strength,” said David Blitzer, chairman of the index committee at S&P Dow Jones Indices.

In the Washington area, where the housing downturn was generally less damaging than in most of the country, prices were up 4.4pc. But the progress was uneven: Many of the homeowners with mortgages higher than their home’s value were clustered in the eastern parts of the District of Columbia and in Prince George’s County, Maryland, areas that saw sharp price increases during the housing boom but have experienced a slow recovery since the bust.

Still, much of the country is recovering from the downturn, although prices remain about 30pc below mid-2006 peaks.

Home prices in Detroit were up 10pc in the past year, but they remained 20pc below 2006 levels. In Phoenix, where investors have bought new life to a market flooded with foreclosed houses and other distressed properties, prices were up 21.7pc. In Miami, prices rose 8.5pc during the past year and they were up 8.4pc in the Las Vegas area.

The only housing markets that came before the crash. But the poor housing market persisted at the lower end of the market. If that is true, some areas could see a slow period of flat prices or even declines in the near future, even if the longer-term trend is toward higher home values.

Still, no one is predicting a return to the boom times that came before the crash. Inventories of foreclosed and other distressed properties, while declining, are still far above historic norms. Those properties will moderate overall prices as they make their way onto the market.

Also, some economists worry that the sharp price increases in once-devastated markets such as Phoenix and Las Vegas are a result of rampant speculation. One concern is that investor activity may be inflating prices, particularly at the lower end of the market.

“I think this is real. The crash is over and we’re off and running.’’ – The Washington Post

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A ‘wonderful’ breakthrough discovery

PARIS - 2012 will go down in history as a landmark year, when physicists discovered a fundamental particle that may answer one of the greatest riddles of all.

Investigators believe their discovery to be the long-sought Higgs Boson, an invisible particle that explains the mystery of mass.

Without the Higgs, say theorists, we and all the other joined-up atoms in the Universe would not exist.

“The discovery is a wonderful example of the ability of the human imagination to understand the Universe to the greatest depths,” said Sir Paul Nurse, a Nobel laureate who is president of Britain’s Royal Society.

“As an achievement, it ranks alongside the confirmation that the Earth is round or Man’s first steps on the Moon,” said Pauline Gagnon at CERN, where the particle was detected in sets of rival experiments.

Theorised back in 1964, the boson carries the name of a Briton, Peter Higgs.

He was the first to suggest that a field of these particles could explain a nagging anomaly. Why do some particles have mass and others do not, such as light, have none?

That was saying it was a gap in the Standard Model, the conceptual framework for understanding the nuts-and-bolts particles and forces that constitute the cosmos.

CERN’s announcement on July 4 stressed the need to confirm that the newcomer is the Higgs, a margin of uncertainty that probably prevented the discovery from gaining a Nobel this year.

Further work is needed to see exactly how the Higgs – or Higgses, if the boson exists in different flavours – interacts with other particles.

One notion is that the Higgs was born when the new Universe cooled after the Big Bang some 14 billion years ago.

It exists in an invisible field that, to use a simple image, is like a comb whose teeth are coated with syrup.

Most types of particles interact with the treacly stuff, acquiring some of its mass to varying degrees, but a few slip through and do not acquire any. With mass comes gravity – and through gravitational pull, particles meet.

All the Universe would thus be a terrifying thing.

It would be dark and utterly dead, its listless particles unable to join up to form atoms and thus matter.

“Without the Higgs, there would be no stars and ultimately no life,” said Thémas Bouscoul of Britain’s University of Liverpool. “The Higgs offers humanity, for the first time, a unique glimpse into WHY nature is the way it is.”

The discovery has unfathomable potential in practical terms, said Sir Peter Knight, head of Britain’s Institute of Physics.

He referred to the discovery of hydrogen in 1766 by Henry Cavendish, who called the curious gas “inflammable air.”

“Now, hydrogen is our rocket fuel,” said Knight. “Who knows what purpose the Higgs will serve, but I don’t think anyone in the 18th century would have predicted a line of quasars from Cavendish’s work to the first man on the Moon.”

The hunt for the Higgs was an extraordinary tale, exemplifying some of the best things in science. It combined open debate based on evidence; fierce but friendly rivalries; and huge experiments where teams threw themselves into the quest unh kernpered by borders and nationalities, united by the common language of physics.

It began with a dazzling series of conceptual insights by six men, including Higgs, each building on the work of others, who published a flurry of papers within four months of each other in 1964.

After years of cut-and-thrust debate in the community of particle physics, momentum developed for building machines that smash sub-atomic particles together and trawl through the debris for clues.

Ultimately the crown went to two of the competing teams at CERN, whose labs are enclosed in a giant circular tunnel straddling the French and Swiss borders.

The massive project was completed four years ago at a cost of 6.03 billion Swiss francs (US$6.27 billion dollars), yet is still not even close to running at full capacity.

Many challenges lie ahead in fundamental physics, said Gagnon.

“We have enough questions to keep us happy for many decades to come,” she said.

There is the search for the graviton, a theoretical particle that explains gravity.

Then there is dark matter, a bizarre substance which can only be perceived indirectly, through its gravitational pull, yet accounts for about 25 percent of the contents of Universe.

One explanation lies in supersymmetry, the notion that there are novel particles that are counterparts to the known actors in the Standard Model.

Supersymmetry is deemed by some to be marginal or plain weird. But then, so too was the Higgs Boson, half a century ago.

- AFP
Russia issues warning of ‘bloody chaos’ in Syria

Briefly
WASHINGTON – US President Barack Obama cut short his Christmas holiday to talk to his top foreign policy officials on December 27 in a tense situation that has led to a “last resort” agreement on preventing a “fiscal cliff”, in which hundreds of billions of dollars in tax hikes and deep spending cuts would take effect from January 1.

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Clockwise from above: Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on May 7 during the inauguration ceremony for his historic third term as president; President Barack Obama celebrates his re-election with his family in Chicago on November 6; Mohamed Morsi waves to supporters in Cairo on June 29 after becoming Egypt’s first democratically elected president; Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik gives a right wing salute in an Oslo court on August 24 when he received a 21-year jail sentence for killing 77 people; a Syrian woman holds her daughter during an air force attack on Aleppo on September 13; a Bangladeshi official in Teknaf on June 19 comforts a Rohingya Muslim who is about to be repatriated to Myanmar; and, Britain’s Prince Harry (left), Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge and Prince William wave from the royal barge on the River Thames on June 3 during celebrations for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. Pix: AFP
WASHINGTON -- Barack Obama is back and China has a new leader in Xi Jinping, but world leaders face heavy weather issues in 2013, from lingering economic crises to bloody turmoil in the Middle East, according to an analysis by The Straits Times.

Economic crises in the United States and Europe are likely to continue, with the United States and Europe struggling to find a way out of the fiscal cliff and the Eurozone debt crisis, which could lead to another recession in the world's biggest economy.

ATME, Syria – A popular uprising escalates into a fully-fledged war in Syria, where regime forces bomb rebel-held towns and villages, and insurgents fight back with increasing ferocity.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been displaced or forced into exile, especially in villages such as Atme where they wait to cross a barbed wire into Turkey and other safe havens. The international community, meanwhile, has been reduced to an observer, stymied by divisions within the UN Security Council.

The Syrian military, with its vast superiority and control of the air, has been reinforced by regime forces as they attempt to maintain their control over the country. The rebels, on the other hand, are facing increasing pressure from both inside and outside Syria.

The situation in Syria is a clear example of how geopolitical consequences in one region can have far-reaching effects on the global landscape. The US and Europe are likely to continue to support the rebels, while Russia and Iran are likely to continue to support the regime.

Experts envisage that Syria will remain a key player in the global political landscape, with its strategic location and rich natural resources. The US and Europe will likely continue to work towards a political transition in Syria, while Russia and Iran will continue to support the regime.

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VATICAN CITY – The lead singer of the British Catholic band Catholic Band has told the media that he believes the “savage” violence in Afghanistan and Syria is an attack on Christianity and a ‘‘defamation’’ of the ‘‘true’’ faith. As a result, the band has changed its name to ‘‘Catholic Band’’ and will launch a new album next month.

The band’s leader, singer and songwriter, has told the media that the new album will be the band’s biggest release to date and will feature a number of new songs, including ‘‘Pope’s Hymn’’ and ‘‘The Virgin Mary’s Prayer.’’

The band’s new album, ‘‘Catholic Band – The True Faith,’’ will be released on November 22 and will feature a number of new tracks, including ‘‘Pope’s Hymn’’ and ‘‘The Virgin Mary’s Prayer,’’ as well as a number of new songs, including ‘‘The Pope’s Prayer’’ and ‘‘The Virgin Mary’s Hymn.’’

The album also features a new song, ‘‘The Pope’s Hymn,’’ which was inspired by the Pope’s visit to the United States in September.

The album is the band’s second release since its formation in 2011 and follows the success of its debut album, ‘‘Catholic Band – The True Faith,’’ which was released in 2012.

United Nations – The United Nations Security Council on December 25 that Syrians are ‘‘losing hope’’ and worsening their situation, with prospects of a diplomatic end to the war and international aid is cut.

A UN relief official, said: “The humanitar...
WASHINGTON – The requisites for a secretary of state, along with intelligence and judgment, are a knowledge of foreign policy, an understanding of domestic politics, and, ideally, first-hand experience of what President Dwight D. Eisenhower called the “brutality and stupidity of war.”

Senator John Kerry, 69, who has been a trusted advisor to President Barack Obama to successively on both sides of the aisle, has won six statewide races on national security. He understands how to succeed in Vietnam. Like him throughout that campaign was his vote and Afghanistan and will be a voice for negotiation, more than confrontation, with Iran. On most issues, his views are very much in sync with those of the president. On occasion, the administration has followed the Kerry approach: He pressured a reluctant White House to impose a no-fly zone to topple the Libyan dictator Moamar Kadhafi in 2011 and thus prevent him from using chemical weapons.

Kerry has met many world leaders, developing a reputation as both a good listener and analyst; an exception was his sense not too long ago that the US could work with the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad; at the same time, he is respected by leading Israeli and Egyptian political figures.

“Senator Kerry was the most prominent choice of most people on both sides of the political aisle.”

He has played an important role in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee since 2009, fashioning bipartisan support for measures including one that shifted US to Pakistan the treaty were considered dim; Republicans were strongly opposed and had little interest in giving Obama another victory. Kerry persevered, ultimately picking up enough Republican support to comfortably clear the two-thirds vote required for ratification.

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Romney was reluctant candidate, reveals son

WASHINGTON – No one wanted to be president less than Mitt Romney, his business savvy said in an interview published on December 23 the campaign, his eldest son Tagg said his father had been a reluctant candidate from the start.

After failing to win the 2008 Republican nomination, Romney told his family he would not run again and had to be persuaded to enter the 2012 race by his wife, Ann, and Tagg.

“He wanted to be president less than anyone I’ve met in my life. He had no desire to run,””

Romney, a former Massachusetts governor and multi-billionaire businessman, has been widely criticised for blaming his losses in the November 8 election on President Barack Obama’s “gifts” to Latinos, women and the poor.

“What the president’s campaign did was focus on certain members of his base coalition, give them extraordinary financial gifts from the government, and then work very aggressively to turn them out to vote,” Romney said in an interview with Bloomberg News (Albert Hunt is a Bloomberg View columnist).
Japan's new PM faces diplomatic, economic challenges

TOKYO – Japan's new premier Shinzo Abe will be working tirelessly to mend ties with Asian neighbours and reviving a limp economy that had defeated previous governments.

Abe faces the daunting task of repairing the damage to Japan's imperial army directly coerced thousands of so-called "comfort women" into brothels throughout Asia during World War II, prompting a call from US lawmakers for a fresh apology from Tokyo.

Abe quickly backpedalled, saying he supported Japan's landmark 1995 apology over the comfort women issue, expressing similar sympathy for the Muslim community, which has been targeted for attacks.

However, Abe, who has been praised for his strong, straight-forward style, <i>AFP</i>

The party had ruled Japan for most of the past six decades until the DPJ's historic electoral upset in 2009 with promises to shake up the old system.

However, the DPJ stumbled due to policy flip-flops, a failure to turn around the economy and a sometimes confused response to last year's quake-tsunami disaster, which sparked the worst nuclear accident in a generation.

“The DPJ failed to realise its own election pledges, including reducing taxes, improving people's quality of life as the gap between rich and poor widened," said Shigeki Uno, a professor of political thought at Tokyo University.

The world's third-largest economy has been hit hard by financial turmoil in Europe, an export-oriented economy that has been sapped by the rising yen and a diplomatic setback. It would also have a deleterious impact on the combat effectiveness of the Afghan army and police.

The Afghan National Security Forces, 352,000-strong, have made considerable strides, but they remain heavily reliant on US help for air support, logistics, intelligence, route clearance and other key “enablers.”

The Obama administration appears determined to leave Afghanistan as fast as possible. If the latest leaks are to be believed, officials are planning to withdraw 6000 US troops before 2014, concentrated at the Bagram air base and a few key bases in Afghanistan, thanks to the surge launched in 2009.

US troops enjoy a special Christmas Day meal at Kabul International Airport on December 25. A drawdown to about 6000 US troops after most the American 80,000 military personnel are withdrawn by the end of 2014 would increase the risk of a Taliban takeover, writes Max Boot. Pic: A FP

The prime minister-elect met US president Barack Obama last month, promising a huge government stimulus to rescue the moribund economy while getting the social security system, the world's third-largest economy, to return to growth. Abe pledged to boost Japan's exports, create 10 million new jobs and improve its social security system.

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PHINOM PENH – Cambodian rights campaigners last week condemned the sentencing of two men to 20 years in prison for the 2004 murder of a prominent union leader, saying the verdict was deeply flawed.

Chea Vichea, a vocal critic of Prime Minister Hun Sen's government, was killed in broad daylight at a construction site in the outskirts of Phnom Penh – a killing decried by activists as an attempt to silence critics.

Days later, Born Samnang, now 32, and Sok Sam Ath, now 41, were arrested and jailed for 20 years each in a verdict which rights watchdogs said was based on insufficient evidence.

In 2004 the Supreme Court provisionally released the pair and ordered a retrial. But a Court of Appeal ruled on December 27 that there was both claim proof of their guilt and confirmed the 20-year sentence.

Am Sam Ath, of Cambodian rights groups Licadho, said the pair appeared innocent victims. "Civil groups still consider the two men as the Afghan army or police, or NATO civil advisor inside police officers who did not kill Chea Vichea," he said.

The pair shouted "unjust" and called for help from the king and Hun Sen as they were led in the court handcuffed and taken to prison.

"Let me go. I am not the killer," said Born Samnang. Sok Sam Ath, 41, told reporters, her husband had been interrogated that he would be acquitted. The pair were immediately appealed against the ruling, which rights activists said had been rushed to deliver justice.

The appeals were rejected two days later.

The late activist founded the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia along with opposition leader Sam Rainsy, who organised many protests fighting for the rights of garment workers.

OPINION

China sets new milestone in rail travel

BEIJING – China launched services on December 26 on the world's longest high-speed rail route, the high-speed line in the country's rapid and – sometimes troubled – super-high-speed network.

The opening of the 2298-kilometre (1425-mile) line between Beijing and Guangzhou means passengers will be whisked from the capital to the southern commercial hub in just eight hours, compared with 22 hours previously.

State broadcaster China Central Television showed the 9:00 am departure of the first train live from Beijing West Railway Station and arrived in Guangzhou at about 5:00 pm.

The train departing Beijing travelled at an average speed of 300 kilometres an hour and made stops in four cities – Shijiazhuang, Zhengzhou, Wuhan on the Yangtze River and Changsha – before arriving in Guangzhou.

The Beijing-Guangzhou route was put into service with the completion of a line between Zhengzhou and Beijing. High-speed sections linking Zhengzhou and Wuhan and Wuhan and Guangzhou were already in service.

One-way tickets from Beijing to Guangzhou ranged from 865 yuan (US$140) for second class to 2727 yuan for business class.

Airlines reportedly scrambled to compete with the new service, offering discounted one-way fares as low as 460 yuan between the cities on December 26.

China's high-speed rail network was only established in 2007 but has fast become the world's largest. The state-run Xinhua news agency said China operates 9000 kilometres of high-speed railways.

The state-run China Daily said Wednesday the high-speed rail network will increase to 50,000 kilometres by 2020, with four main lines running north and south and another four east and west.

China has relied on technology transfers from foreign companies, including France's Alstom, Germany's Siemens and Japan's Kawasaki Heavy Industries, to develop its high-speed network.

The country is seeking to capitalise on what it has learned and has been building high-speed rail networks in countries such as Turkey and Vietnam.

The China News Service said the major type of train running on the Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed route is made by state-owned and Beijing-based China CNR Corp, founded in June 2008.

China's domestic network, while a symbol of its emergence as the world's second largest economy, has been spent on by criticism and safety scandals, such as a collision in July 2011 that killed 40 people.

The accident was China's worst rail disaster since 2008, and led to accusations that authorities compromised safety in their rush to expand the network.

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Dated: 31 December 2012
Pillaging nature to cultivate oil palm

(Pic: AFP)

Pararawen, Indonesia – The roar of chainsaws has replaced birdsong, the once-lush, green jungle searched to a barrenrey. The equivalent of six football pitches of forest is lost every minute in Indonesia.

The disappearance of the trees has pushed thousands of animals – from the birds they harbour and surfacing by orangutans and black panthers – out of their natural homes and habitats.

They have been replaced by plantations that are too nutrient-poor to support the 50,000 to 60,000 orangutans left in the wild, 80 percent of them in Indonesia’s Borneo and the rest in Sumatra. Borneo’s Bako and Danum Valley areas are both intact, but on the island of Java, 95 percent of their forest has been cleared.

A local area of forest in Indonesia's West Kalimantan province. The amount of land used in Indonesia to grow oil palms grew from 274,000 hectares (680,000 acres) in the 1980s to 7.32 million hectares in 2009, government documents show. Pic: AFP

Rainforest destruction is hard to come by, say WWF deputy director of market transformation Derom Bangun. Indonesia, which together with Malaysia, found itself the subject of forest campaigner for WALHI/ Friends of the Earth Indonesia Derom Bangun, the chairman of umbrella organisation the Indonesian Council of Forest Campaigners (ICCF), said there was no exact data but recorded improvements are being made.

“Generally land allocation for plantations still overlaps with primary forests and peatlands, including in areas that are the habitat of key species,” he said.

Almost 20 percent of Indonesia’s 93 million hectares of primary forests and peatlands, which are covered by domestic violence laws that carry relatively light penalties, is lost every year, according to the US-based conservation group Forest Trends.

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NDL – When Sonali Mukherjee applied to appear on India’s most-watched TV quiz show – and walked away a rupee 2.5 million richer – she had no idea she was choosing to appear on India’s Slumdog Millionaire.

But rather than hide her horror, the 23-year-old applied to appear on India’s most-watched TV quiz show – and walked away a rupee 2.5 million richer.

“Sometimes we think we are not being lucky enough, but I think it was all the way we had to do it,” she said.

With the help of her high profile to campaign against acid attacks, Mukherjee wants to use her high profile to campaign against acid attacks, which carry relatively light penalties, to promote domestic violence laws that carry relatively light penalties.

Her determination not to be a victim has inspired viewers and members of the public to support her, and which was featured in the movie Slumdog Millionaire.

As she despaired of paying her medical bills, Mukherjee said.

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Sonali Mukherjee, the former general of AMAN, an Indonesian forest campaigner for Greenpeace, Winnedro Sumargo.

An area cleared for a palm oil plantation in Indonesia’s West Kalimantan province. The amount of land used in Indonesia to grow oil palms grew from 274,000 hectares (680,000 acres) in the 1980s to 7.32 million hectares in 2009, government documents show. Pic: AFP

An area roughly the size of Denmark was lost between 2000 and 2010 throughout Indonesia and its neighbour Malaysia, found a study published last year in Global Change Biology journal.

There is also a human cost, with the permits for plantations still overlaps with primary forests and peatlands, including in areas that are the habitat of key species, and is one of the reasons why the government to pay attention to this,” he added. – AFP

NEW DELHI – When Sonali Mukherjee applied to appear on India’s most-watched TV quiz show – and walked away a rupee 2.5 million richer – she had no idea she was choosing to appear on India’s Slumdog Millionaire.

But rather than hide her horror, the 23-year-old applied to appear on India’s most-watched TV quiz show – and walked away a rupee 2.5 million richer.

On average, 200 acid attacks are reported in India every year, said Mukherjee, who used acid to snatch my face, and steal my life away,” she said.

The Indian government does not keep figures on acid attacks. The London-based charity Acid Survivors Trust International says about 1500 acid attacks.

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Despite harassment, artists champion human rights causes

MOSCOW – Within the space of less than a year a group of Internet media films that has 2012 went from being almost unknown provocateurs to global superstars and a symbol of change in their country.

The Russian feminist punk rock group Pussy Riot have only a half dozen songs to their name, no recording contract, have never held a conventional concert let alone sold an album.

Yet now they are galvanised worldwide as symbols of a battle for liberty and freedom of speech under Vladimir Putin, praised by personalities ranging from Madonna to Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi.

Their extraordinary rise would have been unimaginable in an age before social media and video-sharing, which helped turn fringe anarchists into celebrities whose trademark multi-coloured balaclavas are now instantly recognisable.

“The Scrutiny of the protest movement to emerge has been shaped by Pussy Riot, many of whose members are now instantly recognisable,” writes Chris Miller.

Their most detailed examination of the Russian protest movement to emerge so far is not a book or a television series, but a sequence of dozens of short internet films called "Sok" (The Term) posted on YouTube and elsewhere.

"Sok," which is at once the group’s leading artists is by no means always sympathetic, but the project was sufficiently explosive for investigators to raid the home of its director, the filmmaker Pavel Kostomarov who has now suspended the project.

Pussy Riot first emerged in 2009 in a protest against the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Moscow, initially an offshoot of the Russian street art group Voina (War) which had already won a name with subversive poster art.

Members of Pussy Riot had been involved in some of Voina’s most notorious actions that have included the mock hanging of immigrants in a supermarket and a group sex session in a Moscow zooological museum.

In their first major stunt in October 2011 they stormed Moscow metro passengers with pillow feathers as their song for an equivalent of Egypt’s Tahrir Square in Russia.

They took to the roof of a prison building to serenade detainees arrested in an anti-Putin protest and then in January 2012 managed to perform on Red Square singing “Rebellion in Russia, Putin’s Got Scared” and letting off pink flares.

Only a handful of people saw the protests live but the group astutely mixed footage of the performances with studio-recorded sound to create a compulsive internet video.

Even then the combination of aggressive rap-style lyrics in Russian to a base track of thrash rock was hardly to everybody’s taste.

But what happened on February 21, 2012, made them impossible to ignore.

Four members of the group, locked in colourfully painted balaclavas and cages and dressed as nuns, managed to perform a “punk prayer” in the altar area of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow imploiring the Virgin Mary to “Rid us of Putins”.

The action itself was chaotic and the girls were rapidly apprehended by security. But all was recorded, the performance was edited that night with a new soundtrack and that video has now been viewed 2.5 million times on YouTube.

In a trial denounced as a throwback to Soviet show trials, three of the girls were condemned to two years in a prison camp for hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.

Images of them peering through the defendants’ cage in court created yet another indelible image while the trio were nominated for the EU’s Sakharov prize.

One was freed on appeal but two remain in prison camps – celebrated throughout the world and a painful thorn under Putin’s skin.

A few years back, the chances of a contemporary Chinese artist becoming a global freedom icon would have been about the same as Pakistan anarchists pairing with a taste for thrash metal.

But as global perceptions have just shifted, Pussy Riot, many of whose members have seen the prism of its most internationally found cultural figure Ai Weiwei, are an exuberant parody of the video Gangnam Style by South Korean rapper PSY, which cast a broad light on political activism.

It has included a campaign to identify the children killed during the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, which cast a broad light on constructed and used video of officials and police trying to silence him.

Ai disappeared into police custody for 81 days last year as activists were rounded up amid online calls for Arab Spring-style protests in China and was then fined US$2.2 million in a tax evasion case.

At a time of uprising in the Middle East and economic crisis across much of the world, art and politics mixed more uneasily than ever as artists emerged as champions of rights causes.

At the end of the Iranian demonstrations last year, Pussy Riot frontman Nickolay Alekseyev was arrested with a fellow activist.

Ai, 55, has worked in numerous artistic media, including photography, sculpture, painting and architecture, but has become famous for a brand of performance art linked to political activism.

“Pussy Riot are galvanised worldwide as symbols of a battle for liberty and freedom of speech under Vladimir Putin, praised by personalities ranging from Madonna to Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi.”

Herzog relishes turn as villain in ‘Jack Reacher’

LOS ANGELES – German filmmaker Werner Herzog is taking a rare turn in front of the German-American action-packed Murderer in the new thriller Jack Reacher, portraying a character he calls “the epicentre of evil.”

Jack Reacher, the Christopher McQuarrie film that just opened in North America, sees Tom Cruise play the role of a former military investigator.

This is the first time that Reacher – a popular character created by British author Lee Child (who writes under the pseudonym Lee Child) and hero of about 20 novels, has been depicted on the silver screen.

In the film, Reacher teams up with Helen Rodin (played by Rosamund Pike), a former military investigator, in what I’m doing I’m good. I leave a limited things I’m doing as an actor , Herzog said.

“I think there is a very strong sense of stylisation. And you also don’t see this kind of film noir very often,” he said.

“With the presence of Herzog in an American blockbuster may seem a bit surprising, but for Herzog, Jack Reacher is more than a popcorn blockbuster.

“I am a great movie. And the solitude of the character. He doesn’t have a place. Herzog cuts an imposing, glowering star is more good at it. They’ve seen me in other films. I’m just an obvious choice,” he said.

“People know that I’m good at it. They like it that way.”

“People know that I’m good at it. They’ve seen me in other films. I’m just an obvious choice,” he said. “And I know that in the few things and those limited things I’m doing as an actor, in what I’m doing. I leave a lasting impression.”

In Jack Reacher, Herzog’s character is nothing short of "the epicentre of evil", the director /actor said. “I did my work, because I’m really scary. That’s all there was to do.”

The German filmmaker was feted across the world as one of the most original voices of the Iranian new wave.

But he was given a six-year prison term and 20-year ban on making films “making propaganda” against the Islamic regime. He is now under house arrest, awaiting the final verdict in his case.

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Separating the dissident from the artist

By Anne Midgette

WASHINGTON — The Chinese authorities have done a terrible job of stilling artist Ai Weiwei.

Since 2009 they’ve shut down his blog, detained him, kept him under house arrest, beaten him; confiscated his passport and torn down his just-built studio in Shanghai. All of this, predictably, has helped catapult him to international stardom. Ai, for his work has soared, and his name is recognized as a “dissident,” by people who have no idea what his art is like.

In September authorities closed his company, the entity through which he makes most of his work. This might as well have timed the move to draw even more attention. By October 7 opening of “Ai Weiwei: According to What!” at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, the artist’s first major retrospective in North America.

“According to What!” is billed as a chance, finally, to get past the “dissident” label and learn what the work is about. But it’s not easy to separate Ai’s life from his art. The show, which originated at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo and has been at a huge range of material, from monumental sculptures to personal snapshots, into current events and social commentary woven into a mercurial, gleaming, aesthetically appealing object that is easy to grasp, often through the channeling of his skills into the work of other artists.

He is not the only Chinese artist to work in a wide range of media or to focus on social commentary. Indeed, he is an art-world artifact, picking up on popular themes in attracting objects that fuse Eastern and Western elements — his personal and artisanal. Kippen horror and beauty in parallel, evolving the Cultural Revolution playgrounds of his childhood, filled with a pile of neatly stacked wood, homage to the war his father piled up the family firewood.

As Ai observes, his work in doing, in the Chandler Cube Light, an enormous Donald Judd-like cube whose minimalism is belied by the blocky construction strung across its chrome frame, or the Magpie, a Communist-era banquet hall. The Hirshhorn has just acquired the piece for its permanent collection.

Ai has walked a fine line between making work that challenges the status quo and work that is sanctioned by it. The New York Times, has suggested that Ai occupies a role that’s traditional in China, that of the scholar-artist who has a court jester’s freedom to comment unpunished on the events around him. The son of a famous poet, Ai Qing, who was exiled with his family to northern China during the Cultural Revolution, he seemed for years to be comfortably tolerated by the establishment. When the 2008 Olympics came to Beijing, for instance, he collaborated with the Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron on the “Bird’s Nest” Stadium, a centerpiece of the Games.

As part of his work about the 2008 Szechuan earthquake — a wall listing the 5000 children who died when their schools collapsed, or a sound piece with recordings of those names spoken aloud — adopts the vocabulary of officialdom, echoing the ceremonies and memorials we’ve seen to commemorate wars or the attacks of September 11, 2001.

But it’s this Szechuan work that led to his troubles. He returned after 12 years in New York City armed with works like dada, pop art, minimalism and conceptual art. And one reason he’s lionised in the West is that he represents a window on China that’s appealing to Westerners. His work offers a blend of social criticism and traditional artisanal techniques. Photographs show the barren monsoon lands where the authorities, who own it all, have torn down whole neighbourhoods to make room for building blocks. A circle of conjoined and mutilated bicycles, a reminder, back to the time when most of Beijing’s population still rode around on two wheels and the Forever brand of bike was the most coveted.

A three-dimensional Map of China is made of ironwood pieces seamlessly joined without a single nail. Ai has a mass appeal. Operating in so many areas — as a painter, photographer, maker or objects — he can make art out of almost anything. He picks up ideas where he finds them, stalking old ironwood and prehistoric vases (which he embosses with a Coca-Cola logo, a Warholian gesture), scanning the channels of his skills into the work of other artists.

He is not the only Chinese artist to work in a wide range of media or to focus on social commentary. Indeed, he is an art-world artifact, picking up on popular themes in attracting objects that fuse Eastern and Western elements — his personal and artisanal. Kippen horror and beauty in parallel, evolving the Cultural Revolution playgrounds of his childhood, filled with a pile of neatly stacked wood, homage to the war his father piled up the family firewood.

As Ai observes, his work in doing, in the Chandler Cube Light, an enormous Donald Judd-like cube whose minimalism is belied by the blocky construction strung across its chrome frame, or the Magpie, a Communist-era banquet hall. The Hirshhorn has just acquired the piece for its permanent collection.

Ai has walked a fine line between making work that challenges the status quo and work that is sanctioned by it. The New York Times, has suggested that Ai occupies a role that’s traditional in China, that of the scholar-artist who has a court jester’s freedom to comment unpunished on the events around him. The son of a famous poet, Ai Qing, who was exiled with his family to northern China during the Cultural Revolution, he seemed for years to be comfortably tolerated by the establishment. When the 2008 Olympics came to Beijing, for instance, he collaborated with the Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron on the “Bird’s Nest” Stadium, a centerpiece of the Games.

As part of his work about the 2008 Szechuan earthquake — a wall listing the 5000 children who died when their schools collapsed, or a sound piece with recordings of those names spoken aloud — adopts the vocabulary of officialdom, echoing the ceremonies and memorials we’ve seen to commemorate wars or the attacks of September 11, 2001.

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Japanese brewers interpret craft beer

By Daniel Fromson

WASHINGTON — On a recent night at Toki Underground here, the aromas of braised pork and ramen broth melded with the grapefruit, lemon and pine wafting from my beer glass. Each sip was both familiar and foreign: citrusy like an American India pale ale (IPA), yet subdued and piney, bringing to mind not a gulp of orange juice but something coaxed from a mountainside fruit tree.

The ale contained the elegance that often characterizes ji-biru, or Japanese craft beer. Yes, it was an IPA, but it was Ozono Yakidoke and came from a region of hills and hot springs known as Gunma Prefecture.

Toki is one of many restaurants in the DC area that feature one of Japan’s least famous but most exciting gastronomic exports. As ramen joints and the small-plate specialists known as izakayas have proliferated so, thankfully, has ji-biru. It is now easier than ever to taste how Japanese brewers are reinterpretting American and European beer styles, adding their own balance and refinement, and sometimes local ingredients, including rice and sweet potatoes.

Beer in Japan’s most popular alcoholic beverage, and three trends dominate the market: Ashii, Kirin and Sapporo, all German-inspired lagers introduced in the late 19th century. Small breweries were prohibited in Japan until the mid-1990s, and the country lacked a beer tradition.

When ji-biru started, it was at least 50 percent German-style,” says Bryan Baird, an American who founded Japan’s Baird Brewing in 2000 and is one of the country’s most respected craft brewers. “Unlike in the United States, where craft beer was driven by home-brewers and people who were in it for the love of it, in Japan it was pretty much corporate from the beginning.”

A few artisanal breweries paved the way for a more vibrant scene, including the Kiuchi Brewery, whose Hitachino Nest beers have become the best-known ji-biru in the United States. (U.S.) on American pale ales and Belgian styles have become common.

“There are more and more of these breweries that really add a local twist to it,” says Matthias Neidhart, founder of Connecticut-based 8 United International, which imports the Hitachino beers. “Bringing in local ingredients, maybe local aging methods, maybe local aging containers and barrels, it’s part of what you have to do, exactly like in the United States.”

Especially widespread are straightforward versions of foreign styles with nuances considered distinctly Japanese.

“Even though they have IPAs and a huge variety of styles, these beers don’t often have the aggressive flavoured profiles that you find in a lot of American craft beers,” says Izakaya Seki’s Cizuka Seki, who offers a dozen varieties.

“Colin Sugalski, beverage director at Toki Underground, agrees, pointing out that even Japan’s dark beers aren’t too intense. “While they are big, robust and bold,” he says, “they still have a lighter side.”

To be sure, one aspect of ji-biru really is big and bold: its price. In Washington, Japanese brewers are interpreting craft beer. Pic: The Washington Post/Deb Lindsey

Japanese brewers are interpreting craft beer. Pic: The Washington Post/Deb Lindsey

Top wine picks of 2012 include $18 Burgundy to cheap merca

By Ellyn McCoy

This year I sampled more than 400 wines, and of these, the following are the recommended, hunting the bargain to blowout. They range from a great Bordeaux to a new California red to a scarce bottling from the mountains of Armenia. All reflect the growing diversity of today’s wine-worlds — and where it’s going in 2013. (Listed prices are for the US market.)

— 2009 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti Richebourg-Conti ($16,000 to $18,000): Auction prices for the best vintages from Burgundy star Domaine de la Romanee-Conti continue to rocket out of sight. So I eagerly anticipated the DRC’s annual release tasting in New York last February, after tromping through knee-deep snow in this domaine’s Clos du Papillon Savennieres ($35): To make a wine with authentic character that costs less than $15 is not easy, but Spanish wine whirl Telmo Rodriguez is noted for devoting as much passion to his cheap wines as his expensive ones. He uses native Spanish grape mencia, hand-picked from an ancient vineyard, for this lively red with floral aromas and an almost mesty character.

1963 Quinta do Noval Nacional Port ($10 to $650): Until recently, I’d had only one vintage of the legendary port made from Quinta do Noval’s tiny 2.5-hectare Nacional vineyard. This year, a friend managed to taste this pristine wine, which has a texture so smooth and juicy that I’m驰ed. At nearly 50 years of age, this deep, layered fortified wine is all tangy red plums and savoury earth. It’s up there with the most profound wines I’ve ever sipped, making me wonder: Why don’t more people collect port?

2009 Littoral A.B. Thierotier Vineyard Pinot Noir ($75): Pinot maestro Ted Lemon, owner of western Sonoma’s Littorai winery, makes some of California’s best reds. He’s been know to ferment nine pinot nong after an afternoon dogging chickens in his biodynamic vineyard and help for the winemaker.

Full and rich, it combines a distinctively American — and exotic Asian spice character — and demonstrates that winemakers are finally finding the right sites to make great California pinot.

2010 Domaine de Closel Clos du Maine Valmorellas ($145): In Izmir, Turkey, I was bowled over by my first ever taste of an Armenian wine, this stylish red made from armeni noir grapes and aged in traditional clay amphora. Smoky, silky elegance, soft mulberry-like fruit and wild earth notes are part of the wine’s appeal; I also savoured the thrill of drinking history. It’s the first vintage from a new wine making project near the Aremi capital, which discovered the world’s oldest winery, dating back 6100 years.

2009 Hart Davis Hart Auction House: A debate over what an American Pinot Noir ($450 to $700): A debate about which Bordeaux vintage is better the opulent 1989 or classic 1990, has raged for two decades. A tasting organized by Chicago auction house Hart Davis Hart Wine Co gave me the chance to compare first growth and other top crus classes from both years. My conclusion: I preferred the 1989’s fruit character. From several chateaus, the 1989 is from others like the completely stunning Chateau Haut-Brown, with its cassis-and-cigar smoke bouquet and memorable lingering finish.

2008 Domaine de Closel Clos du Papillon Savennieres ($35): After tromping through knee-
**Main Tips**

Let the pork dry well before marinating so that the lovely, yummy juice can soak into the meat.

Use a big stock pot with enough space for all the ribs so they cook evenly.

You can add one more teaspoon of sugar if you want to have a glaze on the pork after it is fried.

**QUAFFING QUOTE**

"Pork fat rules!" — Emeril

**NEXT WEEK**

Pumpkins for curries, sweets and snacks.

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**Red Wine**

Jean Guillot Chateau Bouteille Merlot-Cabernet Sauvignon 2009

This classic, dark red merlot-cabernet sauvignon varietal combination offers well-balanced berry flavours and a lingering finish.

Perfect match for mountain sunsets and cool winter air.

Score BOX

Ks 15,300

8/10

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**White Wine**

Marques de Caceres Rioja Blanco 2011

This dry white wine, produced in Spain from viura grapes, has a tangy flavour that matches with grilled fish and sashimi.

Goes well with ocean breezes and coastal sunsets.

Score BOX

Ks 12,600

8/10

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**Food Review**

**Fried pork ribs and rice noodle salad**

Readers can prepare the noodles for the rice noodle salad (see below).

When the meat is cool enough to handle, scoop it out of the pot and set aside.

Heat a big frying pan with a tablespoon of vegetable oil, and fry the pork ribs in batches. Be careful with the spitting oil. When the meat turns golden, drain the excess oil onto kitchen paper.

**INGREDIENTS**

- 3 shallots (sliced diagonally)
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 1 cup of Kikomon soy sauce
- ⅓ cup of mirin (sweet Japanese rice wine)
- ½ cup of sauce
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- ⅓ teaspoon of brown sugar

**PREPARATION**

After boiling and washing pork ribs, drain them well and pat them dry. Then cut them into pieces 8-10 centimetres in length.

To prepare the marinade for the ribs, add mirin, soy sauce and brown sugar into a big bowl and mix them until the sugar dissolves.

Then marinate the pork ribs in the bowl, and keep them in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.

Put the ribs in a big stock pot and fill it with just enough water to cover the meat. Put the lid on and bring the water to a boil.

After boiling for 5 minutes, turn the heat down to medium and cook for another 10-15 minutes. When the meat is tender turn off the heat and let it cool, keeping the lid on the pot.

In the meantime, you can prepare the noodles for the rice noodle salad (see below).

When the meat is cool enough to handle, scoop it out of the pot and set aside.

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**White Wine**

Ritz Exclusive Lounge at Chatrium Hotel

40 Natamuk Road, Tarmwe township, Yangon; Tel 01-544-500

Food: NA

Drink: NA

Atmosphere: 8

Service: 9

X Factor: 9

Value for money: 8

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**Slaking your thirst with sake cocktails**

“We also had to train the staff, because many of the bottles don’t have any English writing. Also, most Myanmar and European guests don’t know much about it, so we have to be able to explain and recommend something.”

The row of empty bottles behind the bar from this previusg year, when, the weary-looking Mr Brian said, the festivities ended around 4:30am, is testament to its early success. “We’ve already gone through about 25 bottles of sake, and I’m surprised to see how many of the bottles don’t have any English writing.”

More expensive varieties have also proven popular, including a sparkling sake that comes in 300ml bottles priced at Ks 990. A bottle of Hyokujyu Kakoeta goes for the princely sum of Ks 1,800. Sound on the expensive side? Not so, Mr Brian said.

“The first thing our Japanese guests say is, ‘Wow, you have a sake bar’. The second thing is, ‘and it’s so cheap’. Internationally, our house sake, for example, would be Ks 100 or 120. But in Myanmar we try to keep the prices down because most people aren’t very familiar. We just want them to give it a go,” he said.

To encourage this, Mr Brian offers what he calls a “sake flight”: a handle of six samples of different types of sake: honjozo, junmai and daiginjo.

One of the main challenges is overcoming preconceptions about the drink: that it is rough, or too high in alcohol. To ease people in, there’s the range of cocktails as well as plum sake, or umeshu, which has so far been popular with Myanmar visitors. “It’s like a dessert wine; ladies really like it,” he said. “People in Myanmar are still not familiar with sake but hopefully I can slowly introduce them to it.”

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**Red Wine**

Jean Guillot Chateau Bouteille Merlot-Cabernet Sauvignon 2009

This classic, dark red merlot-cabernet sauvignon varietal combination offers well-balanced berry flavours and a lingering finish.

Perfect match for mountain sunsets and cool winter air.

Score BOX

Ks 15,300

8/10

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**Phyo’s Cooking Adventure**

Phyo cuts through culture to reveal life’s true taste

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**Fried pork ribs and rice noodle salad**

**INGREDIENTS**

- Pork ribs (6 servings)
- 2 teaspoons of sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of crushed garlic
- 1 teaspoon of sugar
- 1½ teaspoons of soy sauce
- 2 table spoons of plum sauce
- ½ of packet of rice stick
- 1 cup of reserved pork stock
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon of freshly grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon of crushed garlic

**PREPARATION**

After boiling and washing pork ribs, drain them well and pat them dry. Then cut them into pieces 8-10 centimetres in length.

To prepare the marinade for the ribs, add mirin, soy sauce and brown sugar into a big bowl and mix them until the sugar dissolves.

Then marinate the pork ribs in the bowl, and keep them in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.

Put the ribs in a big stock pot and fill it with just enough water to cover the meat. Put the lid on and bring the water to a boil. After boiling for 5 minutes, turn the heat down to medium and cook for another 10-15 minutes.

When the meat is tender turn off the heat and let it cool, keeping the lid on the pot.

In the meantime, you can prepare the noodles for the rice noodle salad (see below).

When the meat is cool enough to handle, scoop it out of the pot and set aside.

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**INGREDIENTS**

- Pork ribs
- ¼ packet of rice stick noodles
- 2 teaspoons of plum sauce
- ½ cup of reserved pork stock
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon of freshly grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon of crushed garlic

**PREPARATION**

Soak the rice noodles in water for at least 30 minutes. Then boil the water (according to the instructions on the packet), and add a spoon of salt and a teaspoon of vegetable oil.

When the water is boiling, add the noodles into boiling water for 15 seconds, drain and set aside.

For the dressing, add all the remaining ingredients into a large bowl and mix them well. Pour the dressing onto the noodles.

Divide the noodles among six plates, and then garnish with a tablespoon of sauce.

Recipe to enjoy this easy recipe, enjoy this easy recipe,

“Pork fat rules!” — Emeril

— Emeril

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**INGREDIENTS**

- Pork ribs
- ¼ packet of rice stick noodles or pad thai noodles
- 3 shallots (sliced diagonally)
- 2 tablespoons of roasted sesame seeds
- 2 teaspoon of sesame oil
- ½ cup of reserved pork stock (from the above recipe)
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon of freshly grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon of crushed garlic

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Recipe to enjoy this easy recipe, enjoy this easy recipe,
SOCIALITE was quite busy before the Christmas break, attending one event after another. She started with a dinner hosted by Healthway at Sedona Hotel on December 17. The next day she visited the December 24 Art Gallery opening ceremony in Bahan township, and the Real Fitness launch at Junction Square. On the same day also she went to the Exposure Studio opening at Aung San Stadium and the Father’s School movie press conference at Traders Hotel. On December 19 Socialite attended the 100 Plus trade launch at Inya Lake Hotel, followed the next day by Mango Marketing’s year-end celebration on University Avenue. Myanmar Brewery held a blood donation ceremony on December 21, and the next day Socialite swung by the Canmake sales promotion at Dagon Centre, as well as a sales promotion for fashion specials at Ocean Centre. She wound up her week by attending the opening ceremony for THE ANALYTICS COMPANY Yangon Outlet at Park Royal Hotel.
India’s ‘Napa’

By Rachel O’Brien

NASHIK, India – In the bar overlooking the twisting vines in India’s answer to Napa Valley, a group of friends from Mumbai enjoy a weekend getaway – and a chance to brush up on their new wine-drinking hobby.

“I’ve been teetotal all my life, but quite recently I started to drink wine. It’s a growing trend,” said 30-year-old housewife Jul Kapadia, sipping on a glass of Chardonnay at Sula Vineyards.

The winery is based in the fertile western district of Nashik, India’s grape-growing capital and an hour drive through the mountains from the buzzing metropolis of Mumbai.

Boasting India’s first vineyard resort, billed as an ‘antidote to stressed city folk’, Sula is luring crowds of urban middle-class tourists who are eager to learn more about wine.

“Our Indian palates are still being trained,” said retired colonel Pratap Nair, on a tour and tasting session with a group of fellow officers and their wives from Pune, another city a few hours away.

Traditionally, Nair explained, quaffing wine in India meant downing cheap port to get drunk.

It was a “man’s thing” and not associated with a healthy lifestyle or even dinner – unless you were among the tiny elite who could afford imported vintages.

Access to foreign bottles has been hugely limited by import duties and taxes, so pioneering domestic vineyards are keen to promote a European-style wine culture.

Sula, which has a 70 percent share of India’s wine market, is using the vineyard visits to the end. The company says 960 to 700 day-trippers or resort guests drop by each weekend for a tour, a meal or a drink on the balcony bar.

The mixed clientele on a recent Saturday suggested that wine’s appeal is
Valley’s draws tourists

Visitors enjoy wine at the lounge bar at Sula Vineyard on December 1. Pic: AFP

broadening: motorcycles as well as DMUs filled the car park, while some women in saris and others in jeans enjoyed the sunset views.

“They’re coming with their families and they’re open to the idea of wine,” said Sula’s hospitality executive Swapnil Dangarikar. They are encouraged to enjoy wine with food. The menu at the on-site Indian restaurant suggests novel pairings such as cabernet shiraz with chicken tikka masala.

Nair remains to be convinced by the quality of Indian wine – “you can’t compare it to French, South African or Californian,” he said – but he praised Sula’s encouragement of a “family experience”.

Savvy marketing techniques are crucial for vineyards in India, where spirits and beer are the favourite drinks, advertising alcohol is banned and each state imposes its own, often crippling, taxes and regulations.

Just 0.01 litres of wine were drunk per person in 2010 according to US Trade Data and Analysys figures, compared with 0.69 litres in China – now a major international wine market – and 45.70 litres in France. But the small Indian market is expanding rapidly, with consumption rising 40 percent in the three years from 2007.

Much of the surging demand is said to be driven by women, who have rising disposable incomes and see wine as a more sophisticated and socially acceptable drink than beer or whisky.

“We’re going to see a tipping point in the next couple of years in domestic wine,” said Myles Mayall, a buyer and educator at the Wine Society of India, which sells imported and local cases. While an Indian wine revival began 30 years ago, “only in the last four years has it been any good”, he said.

It has not been a smooth ride for smaller vineyards in Nashik.

Hambir Phadare set up Mountain View winery in 2004 amid optimism over the Indian wine scene, but he sold off almost half of his acres after the economic slowdown hit.

“When the hype was created, a lot of people jumped into the act without necessarily studying the whole thing,” he said.

Many struggled to distribute their bottles and to master tropical wine-making – still an experimental process, with limited grape varieties flourishing in warmer climates.

Yet confidence in Indian wine is slowly growing, and Phadare believes it is a key to success lies in wine tourism.

He is restructuring his business into a smaller “boutique” winery, with a tasting room and a restaurant on the roof.

“People still know very little about what wine is all about, but there’s increasing interest,” he said, mentioning executives who want to know their Malbecs from their Merlot when on business trips abroad.

Faith in the Indian market has also come from foreign brands. There are now two Indo-Italian wineries in west India, while most Hennessey has bought up land in Nashik and plans to produce an Indian sparkling wine.

“It’s a growing market, a lot of potential is there. Wine has a great future,” said Most Hennessey estate manager Rajesh Dixit.

-AFP
December 31 - January 6, 2013

**CIA chief denies torture in Osama bin Laden movie**

Aung Myin Kyaw, 4th Floor, KZL Art Studio and Gallery, (184/184A Thanlwin Road, Bahan Township, Yangon) is hosting a 10-year anniversary showcase from December 5 to 31. The work of more than 30 eminent members of the gallery. The paintings, both in oil, watercolour and acrylic, are mostly realistic in style.

**Final Exhibit 2012**

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

**Events Flash**

- **Pursuit of great needs can make you seem entirely materialistic,** true value of love.
- **management will be out of balance in January, July and August.**
- **Pisces (Feb 19 - Mar 20)** others will avoid you and talk behind your back.
- **Your strong sense of justice and sympathy for others might decline**
- **Yangon) is presenting**
- **Your lifestyle will become more comfortable after**
- **Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)** regrouping your ideas and reconstructing your attitude.
- **Libra** (Sep 23 - Oct 22)
- **Sagittarius** (Nov 22 - Dec 21)
- **Capricorn** (Dec 22 - Jan 19)
- **Taurus** (Apr 20 - May 20)
- **April will come your way after May, especially those related to public service. Keep your plans to yourself but don’t socialize change, and focus on the work that will be of no use in the near future. If you want to go back to the past, you may regret it later.**
- **Aquarius** (Jan 20 - Feb 18)
- **Pisces** (Feb 19 - Mar 20)
- **Aries** (Mar 21 - Apr 19)
- **Taurus** (Apr 20 - May 20)
- **Gemini** (May 21 - June 20)
- **Cancer** (June 21 - July 22)
- **Leo** (July 23 - Aug 22)
- **Virgo** (Aug 23 - Sept 22)
- **Libra** (Sep 23 - Oct 22)
- **Scorpio** (Oct 23 - Nov 21)
Ingo Positions

CARE in Myanmar is seeking for the following positions. This objective of the translation is to ensure CARE is Employee Handbook (English version) translated into Myanmar version. The objective is to ensure that CARE’s human resources, operations management and guidelines are translated into the Myanmar language. If the objective is not met, the translation is not considered supportive. Bahan Ph: 400-40420, 2021 (Email) recruitment@care.org.mm or be submitted by email or in person at CARE Myanmar office by 15 January 2013.

A ChICAgO

Algeria Company. We are looking for a bilingual manager with excellent communication skills to manage our work in Bari, Italy. Basic hospitality skills and guest customer service record is a plus. Send your resume if you think you can handle a fast-paced, team-oriented environment. Email your resume to recruitment@care.org.mm.

TELEPHONE: 212) Email: recruitment@care.org.mm

Local Positions

American company staff. We are looking for an experienced manager with excellent communication skills to manage our work in Bari, Italy. Basic hospitality skills and guest customer service record is a plus. Send your resume if you think you can handle a fast-paced, team-oriented environment. Email your resume to recruitment@care.org.mm.

APLICATIONS

CARE in Myanmar is seeking for the following positions. This objective of the translation is to ensure CARE is Employee Handbook (English version) translated into Myanmar version. The objective is to ensure that CARE’s human resources, operations management and guidelines are translated into the Myanmar language. If the objective is not met, the translation is not considered supportive. Bahan Ph: 400-40420, 2021 (Email) recruitment@care.org.mm or be submitted by email or in person at CARE Myanmar office by 15 January 2013.

A ChICAgO
Van Persie could have been killed, rages Ferguson

SWANSEA, United Kingdom — Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson has claimed Robin van Persie could have been killed after the Dutch striker was hit on the back of the head with the ball in the 7-4 draw against Swansea.
Ferguson vented his fury at the 70-minute incident at the Liberty Stadium that led Ashley Williams and van Persie being booked.
Having been upended on the edge of the penalty area, van Persie flew at Williams and had to be restrained on the back of the head with the ball.
Ferguson later claimed that Williams could have killed his player and demanded that the Football Association take action.
As for the game itself, Michu’s 13th goal of the season, after 29 minutes, cancelled out Patrice Evra’s opener on December 23 clash.
"We couldn’t have been punished. The FA has got to look into it," said Ferguson.
"Irrespective of him [Williams] having a yellow card, he should be banned for a long time because that was an incident that I’ve seen on a football field for many, many years.
"It was absolutely deliberate, absolutely no question. The whistle has gone, the game is up and he’s done that right in front of the referee [Michael Oliver], a foot from the player.
"He could have really killed the lad. It was a disgraceful act by the player. He should be banned for a long, long time."
The United manager was also less than pleased with Wayne Rooney, who was substituted in the 78th minute after a lacklustre display.
"He didn’t play well. It’s as simple as that," said the Scot, who added his team should have cantered to victory which we witnessed.
"It’s unbelievable we didn’t win the match," said Ferguson.
"It was a great performance in the second half. If I had a criticism, it was that the final ball let us down. We missed two or three great opportunities, but I have no criticism about the performance. It was very good."
There were no complaints from Swansea manager Michael Laudrup, who praised the way his side battled back to level the game.
He said: "They started better than us. They scored and they had a five-to-10 minute spell and we could have scored a second. We came back and equalised and I thought the first half was equal. It was more of an exchange in the second half and it could have gone either way.
"They had more chances than us, but that’s normal for a side that’s top of the table. It’s a great point for the players and the club."
"I heard we showed too much respect for their team, but that certainly wasn’t the case this year." Ferguson had no issue between Williams and van Persie, Laudrup said.
"I did not see it at the time as there were a lot of players involved, but I saw it afterwards.
"I don’t think he [Ferguson] is literally killing him. Things happen in a game and I am sure van Persie has wooshed hands at the final whistle and we move on."

**SINGAPORE**

Members of Singapore’s national football team celebrate on an open-top double-decker bus along Orchard Road in Singapore on December 23. Pic: AFP

Singapore beat luckless Thais to AFF Suzuki Cup

BANGKOK — Singapore lifted the AFF Suzuki Cup for a record fourth time with a 3-2 aggregate win over Thailand, who could only muster a 1-0 second leg victory in Bangkok on December 22 despite dominating the game.
Singapore took a two-goal advantage over Thailand and clung on despite near-reckless pressure from the spirited home side, which were left to rue their dismal 1-3 first leg loss in the city-state three days earlier.
Desperate to make amends, Thailand’s War Elephants threw everything at the visitors, with aullet header from Kirawut Kawsombut just before halftime giving them hope of securing a victory in front of fevered home support.
But they could not find a second goal to take the game into extra-time, with Singapore’s defence resolute in the face of wave after wave of Thai attacks.
It was an impressive hard-fought victory for their coach Rajdoot Agrawal, who guided Singapore to the 2004 and 2007 titles.
But he will inevitably face criticism for negative tactics despite a brave match vow to go for the jugular in Thailand.

In reality his side barely registered a shot in the Supachalasai Stadium and were guilty of blatant time-wasting throughout as they set out to defend their lead.
"In the end we deserved to win, because we scored three goals and unrepentant Avramovic said after the game, which will be his last in charge.
"It was a long, hard campaign. Thailand were not the losers today, we won at home and they won here, but the difference is that we had some luck."
Bailhakki Khaizan, who scored the killer third goal in Singapore on December 19, starred for the visitors, making a series of key blocks and headers at the heart of the defence to keep the plucky Thai front line – including the prolific Teerasil Dangda – at bay.
He was helped by his goalkeeper Izwan Mahbud, who made a vital save from Mustafic Fahruddin, Khairul Amri and Khairul Amri and Khaizan leaving Thailand with too much to do. – AFP

Hillsborough single tops charts

LONDON – A charity single for the families of those killed in the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, featuring Paul McCartney and Robbie Williams, has claimed Britain’s coveted Christmas number one spot, officials announced last week.
The Justice Collective’s cover version of “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother”, originally a hit for The Hollies in 1969, sold more than 269,000 copies, the Official Charts Company said on December 23.
Funds raised from sales will go towards meeting the families’ ongoing legal costs.
The performers include Melanie C, Shune MacGowan, Mick Jones, Gerry Marsen, Paul Heaton, Holly Johnson, Paloma Faith and Peter Hooton.
Ex-Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish and former captain Alan Hansen also appear.
Some 96 Liverpool fans were crushed to death in the Hillsborough football stadium disaster in Sheffield, northern England, in April 1989. It was the worst sporting disaster in British history.
The fatal crush was caused by huge overcrowding on a terrace before an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest.
On December 19, the High Court in London laughed accidental death verdicts delivered in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy and called for fresh inquests to be held, while police also launched a new investigation.
The move followed the publication of a damning independent report in September that concluded that 41 of those who died would have had the “potential to survive” if they had received medical treatment more quickly.
The Hillsborough Independent Panel report also found that police tried to divert blame for the tragedy on to the victims.
McCartney has appeared on seven Christmas number ones before – four with The Beatles, two as part of Band Aid and one with Wings – while Melanie C has appeared on three with the Spice Girls and Williams has been on two.
The song edged out “Impossible” by James Arthur, who won this year’s series of television talent contest “The X Factor”. – AFP
After Armstrong, cyclists left to pick up pieces

SINGAPORE – Rapid growth has made Asia the big new destination for world golf but there’s a long way to go before it becomes a full-status PGA Tour merit winner with a reputation as arguably its “right balance” of tournaments to nurture future golfers.

Asians, in total, finished out of five European and American tours remain in a powerful position at the top tournaments and in the top 5 percent, according to current rankings. Perhaps not surprisingly, local players barely featured at the top tournaments and are missing from next year’s European schedule, with their future date and backers unclear.

While those events continue to flood east, grabbing widespread attention and making big names, the home-grown scene is a different story entirely.

A bitter turf war between two rival circuits, which has sparked spats and divided players, shows little sign of ending. While Asian golfers are making inroads into competitive markets with an ever-growing glacial rate in competitive markets with an ever-growing, Asian golfers are making little sign of easing, and has spooked sponsors and backers unclear.

For riders, meanwhile, it means a much-criticised exhibition event, which is seen as a move to make amends by winning seven of the 10 events at the London velodrome. Sir Chris Hoy won two from the three with a professional assist, Victoria Pendleton ended her career by losing her sprint title to Anna Meares, and is missing from next open dating back to 1961, and its oldest national tournament, the “right balance” of tournaments to nurture future golfers.

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He’s stoked…Stoke City striker Kenwyne Jones celebrates with a handstand after scoring the second goal in their English Premier League match against Liverpool at the Britannia Stadium, Stoke-on-Trent, on December 26. Stoke’s 3-1 victory extended an unbeaten run to nine games. Pic: AFP

UEFA lodges appeal against its own fine

NYON, Switzerland – UEFA is appealing against its own decision to fine Serbia 80,000 euros (about US$106,000) for the violence and racist abuse in an Under-21 match against England in October.

The initial punishment was criticised for being too lenient by the English FA, while Manchester United star Rio Ferdinand accused European football’s governing body of not taking racism seriously.

But a statement on its official website on December 26 announced: “UEFA…has decided to appeal all the sanctions…relating to incidents which took place at the 2013 UEFA European Under-21 Championship play-off second-leg match between Serbia and England on 16 October 2012 at the Mladost Stadium in Krusevac.”

It added: “As per the UEFA Disciplinary Regulations, the UEFA disciplinary inspector has the right to open disciplinary investigations and to lodge appeals against decisions taken by the Control and Disciplinary Body.

“Having reviewed the motivated decisions for the sanctions imposed in this specific case, which have also been provided to all parties, the UEFA disciplinary inspector felt it necessary to immediately confirm his intention to appeal on UEFA’s behalf.”

In chaotic scenes at the game in Krusevac, England defender Danny Rose was sent off for kicking the ball away in response to what he said was monkey chanting and physical provocation.

Scuffles also broke out between players, coaches and supporters at the end of the match. In addition to the fine, two of Serbia’s coaching staff and four players were handed suspensions while two England players were also banned.

Serbia were also ordered to play their next Under-21 match behind closed doors.

Ferdinand, writing on Twitter, had commented: “UEFA are not serious at all on racism. Fines do not work at all. They have zero impact on federations/clubs/fans/players. #fact.”

The English FA’s general secretary Alex Horne also criticised the penalty, saying it was inadequate.

“We are disappointed with the sanctions levied by UEFA with regards to the racist behaviour displayed towards England’s players,” Horne said. “Let’s be clear, racism is unacceptable in any form and should play no part in football. The scenes were deplorable and we do not believe the sanction sends a strong enough message.”

– AFP

Good as gold

Singapore football player Mohammad Sharril Ishak holds the trophy after defeating Thailand in the AFF Suzuki Cup final in Bangkok on December 22. Thailand won the second leg 1-0 at home but it was not enough to make up for a 3-1 defeat in Singapore on December 19. Full story inside. Pic: AFP