Tourist arrival figures: They just don’t add up

The government says 3 million tourists visited in 2014 – but its figures are inflated by the including of nearly 2 million border visitors, as well as business and social visa holders.

After death at Letpadaung, a family seeks answers

The shooting of Daw Khin Win by police near the Letpadaung copper mine on December 22 has galvanised opposition to the project among area residents, who say they are not interested in offers of compensation for their ancestral lands. On January 14, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission recommended that police involved in Daw Khin Win’s death face legal consequences, but her sister-in-law has been stopped from filing charges against police and government officials.

Dirty water scandal

The Food and Drug Administration is under pressure to reveal purified water brands that failed safety tests.

Multilevel marketing: Buyer beware?

The steady rise of multilevel marketing amid a weak legal framework has created concerns about the potential for pyramid schemes.
Once was Burma...

Archival material courtesy of Pansodan Gallery
First floor, 286 Pansodan, upper block, Kyauktada township, Yangon

The cover of Shu Daung (Perspective) magazine, 1971. A very Brady assembly of General Ne Win’s revolutionary socialist council.

Obese Yangon cat that went viral on social media last week (image via Yoe Yar Lay)

Page 2 Review: The Interview

Reports surfaced last week about Yangon authorities cracking down on sales of The Interview, the controversial Sony production about an undercover US assassination attempt on North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, generously referred to as a “political satire” on its Wikipedia page.

The New York Times reported that an SIL officer claimed North Korean ambassador Kim Sek-chol had voiced a complaint about the film’s distribution in a meeting with the Yangon chief minister over a week ago, and had provided a list of bootleg DVD outlets selling it in order to expedite its removal from shelves the city over.

Through a carefully cultivated network of nefarious characters and ne’er-do-wells, Page 2 managed to obtain a copy of the film in question and, with that, here marks the launch of a new section I’ll call “Watching films so you don’t have to”.

The Interview, by virtue of it being about assassinating the current leader of an autarkic and nuclear-capable state, caused a stir upon release. Vague threats were made about repercussions for cinema screening it, and a cyber unit believed to originate in North Korea carried out a major hack on production company Sony – all of which served as an invaluable source of what publicists call “buzz,” and made people want to see it more.

Which is probably what will happen with the film being removed from shelves in Yangon, like Rambo IV: John Rambo before it.

Directors Rogen and Evan Goldberg deploy satire as an elegant means of exploring the genesis of the present-day North Korea, illuminating the complex nature of the regime’s power structure and the foundations of what many observers call a personality cult, as well as highlighting pressing issues such as food security and the dilemma faced by the UN et al in engaging with a regime accused of grave human rights abuses – all this, peppered with sometimes overwhelmingly technical explanations of North Korea’s nuclear program.

Just kidding. While they do manage to sneak some facts in that might inadvertently be absorbed by the slavering masses, it’s mostly lazy racial and homophobic gags, dick jokes and explosions that manages to be so extraordinarily boring that it actually took me three goes to finish the whole thing because I kept falling asleep.

The immediate comparisons that spring to mind are Team America: World Police, and Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay – and unfortunately, this doesn’t hold a candle to either’s not that I’m a prude, or not fond of the stoner comedy canon: it’s just a dumb and pointless movie that, if balloon-dropped into NoKo as some are threatening, would only serve to confound. In a statement provided to The Myanmar Times, Human Rights Watch roundly condemned the film.

So, in conclusion, The Interview would have been good if it was better. It would have been better if it was good. Cumulatively, I lost around three hours of my life to this film and so heartily endorse the North Korean embassy’s push to stem its spread. No stars.

In brief:

Expatriates3: Behind on New Year’s resolution
ex-patriates2: Endorse the North Korean embassy’s push to stem the spread of The Interview

Next Week:

Reported... I can’t even

The Myanmar Times

JANUARY 19 /CASE 25, 2015

online editor Kayleigh Long
kayleighlong@gmail.com

Page 2

THE INSIDER: The local lowdown & best of the web

It just doesn’t do justice to Pineapple Express”

David Scott Mathieson
Human Rights Watch

The number of people behaved in judicial killings so far by Saudi Arabia in 2015. This includes Myanmar woman Lalia Bint Abdul Muttablib Basim, whose gruesome execution in Mecca was spread on YouTube last week.

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“The number of people behaved in judicial killings so far by Saudi Arabia in 2015. This includes Myanmar woman Lalia Bint Abdul Muttablib Basim, whose gruesome execution in Mecca was spread on YouTube last week.”
Daw Khin Win's death during a protest last month has only further entrenched opposition to the controversial Letpadaung project.

BY the time Daw Khin Win, a 56-year-old widow, finally made it from her village to the protest at the Letpadaung mine site in Sagaing Region on December 22, police had already swapped their rubber bullets for real ones.

Neighbours say Daw Khin Win, who had trouble walking because of a knee injury, had been reluctant to join the demonstration, which had begun around 8am that morning. But after hearing rumours that her land was being fenced off by the firm developing Letpadaung, she set off to the site to see for herself.

When she arrived at the dusty field beneath the copper-rich mountain at about 2.30pm, events had already taken a bloody turn. A small group of farmers armed with slingshots was facing scores of armed police, who had been instructed to protect mine workers as they moved in with bulldozers and coils of wire to fence off about 3000 acres for the US$1 billion project.

Daw Khin Win soon found herself helping a man with a gunshot wound to his arm, resident U Tar Zar said. He recalled seeing her sit down on the ground at about 2:30pm to light a cigarette to calm her nerves.

This was when a police bullet smashed into her skull, killing her instantly. It was so sudden that the cigarette was still smoldering between her fingers when U Tar Zar reached her body. "She'd heard about the shooting and didn't want to come, but she changed her mind," U Tar Zar said.

"It was actually just a small corner of her land that was being enclosed in the fenced-off area," he added, pointing to the spot where Daw Khin Win died.

The field, which residents say is now the subject of a section 144 curfew, was silent last week, but still littered with polystyrene hunk boxes the police left behind, as well as the occasional bullet. A white circle marked the spot on the ground where Daw Khin Win was sitting when she was shot. Within it lay a small pile of sticks, an empty plastic water bottle and a desiccated red rose.

Barbed-springs of metal wire edged the newly fenced land behind it.

"They took 8 acres from me. That is all I had. They have turned me into a beggar."

Daw Than Mya
Moe Kyo Pyin village resident

But in Daw Khin Win's village of Moe Kyo Pyin, voices are once again being raised against the mine and the land confiscation. And this time the farmers were not alone: their cause is being backed by Myanmar's increasingly mobile civil society movement.

Veteran 88 Generation activists, lawyers, and other campaigners operating under the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA) banner flocked to Monywa yesterday to support the farmers around Letpadaung.

"It's our right to find out the truth about the shooting. It's our right to raise our voice against the oppressors," they chanted together with local farmers at a January 5 demonstration through downtown Monywa.

Later that day, senior activists travelled to the local hospital to meet those injured in the December 22 shootings, as well as Daw Khin Win's relatives and neighbours, where they again joined residents in calling for justice.

The circumstances and tone of the activist-led demonstrations were far different from the bloodshed on December 22, which farmers said was an impromptu response to the fencing of their land - and not the work of outside agitators, as has since been claimed by authorities.

"[The December 22 protest] started when the local people saw the bulldozers destroying our land," said Ko Kyaw Myint Thein, 33, who was shot in the arm during the protest.

Speaking from his hospital bed, he added, "At first it was true that they used rubber bullets, but then they started using real ones."

Protests over land grabs have broken out sporadically at Letpadaung since Chinese firm Wanbao - a subsidiary of arms manufacturer Norinco - and army-owned Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited signed an agreement to develop the mine in 2010.

The morning of the day Daw Khin Win was shot, Myanmar Wanbao sent out an upbeat press release with colourful graphics that indicated 70 per cent of those living around the mine supported the project.

News of her death was reported on the company's website. "Yesterday, we lost a member of the extended Letpadaung family, Daw Khin Win," it said. "Our hearts and prayers are with her family."

It is unlikely Daw Khin Win would have felt much kinship with Myanmar Wanbao. However, neighbours and relatives say she was not someone who would be expected to take part in a potentially violent demonstration.

She was known, however, to have sheltered other land protesters when they were being sought by police following demonstrations in 2013, and her love of the land was one of her defining characteristics, according to friends and family.

"We tried so many times to persuade her to come and live with one of us in Mandalay," said Ma Win Khine, 30, the elder of Daw Khin Win's two daughters. "But she couldn't. She'd stay for a few days and then say she wanted to come back here."

More on news 4

Daw Khin Win's daughter, Ma Win Khine, cries outside her mother's home in Moe Kyo Pyin village, near the Letpadaung mine. Photo: Yu Yu

Copper, blood and a single rose

A spraypainted ring indicates the spot where Daw Khin Win was killed by police on December 22, with the Letpadaung mountain in the background. Photo: Yu Yu
**Why Myanmar’s tourist numbers don’t add up**

Myanmar’s tourist arrival figures were swayed by the inclusion of border visitors, but experts warn that the numbers are not worth dying for,” she said. “They could never replace the security of land ownership for his children and grandchildren.

“Land is fenced off has been in his family for generations. Farming, he said, is “contextual relevance” to Myanmar. “Tourism brings in not just income, but foreign exchange. It is highly labour-intensive, hence generates disproportionate employment opportunities,” he said, adding that they tend to benefit the tertiary-sector middle classes – “a politically and economically important cohort.”

This desire for growth was also evident during the development of the Tourism Master Plan 2013-2020, which was released to much fanfare at the World Economic Forum in June 2014.

While those drafting the report advised that the middle-growth scenario – 2.2 million visitors in 2015 and 5 million in 2020 – was the most likely based on regional experience, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism insisted on going for high-growth: 1.09 million international visitors in 2015 and 7.48 million by 2020. This would be achieved through a tourism revenue from US$534 million in 2013 to US$18 billion in 2020, by which time the industry is expected to create 1.49 million jobs.

Even that high-growth scenario seems to have been blown out of the window. But how did the ministry break the 1 million mark?

According to the Pacific Asia Tourism Association, tourism arrivals shot up sharply in 2013, when border arrivals from India, Bangladesh and Laos were counted alongside those from China and Thailand.

This means that border arrivals, which had hovered between 400,000 and 500,000 a year for a decade, rocketed to 1,144,000 in 2013. Overall arrivals surged to about 1.14 million in 2013.

But the fact is that Myanmar did not receive more than 3 million international tourists last year – at least according to most international statistics. For example, all three of the million-figure – about 1.9 million visitors – were day-trippers from Thailand, China, India, Laos and Bangladesh, according to PATA. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as those who spend at least 24 hours in-country, while PATA counts only overnight visitors.

Numbers of genuine tourists have certainly increased, and sharply. Arrivals through international airports – primarily Yangon, but also including Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, Myeik and Mawlamyine – rose from 505,000 in 2012 to 885,000 in 2013 and 1.08 million last year. The ministry counts all of these arrivals as tourists, even though only 4.2 percent of those who passed through Yangon International Airport in 2014 did so on a tourist visa.

One of the best indicators of genuine tourist arrivals is entrance ticket sales at Shwedagon Pagoda, and these increased from US$452,000 in 2013 to US$562,000 – a rise of 26pc that roughly mirrors the 22pc growth in air arrivals and the 26pc increase in visitors to Inle Lake.

### 4.5 million – a viable dream?

This relatively sluggish growth in air arrivals last year suggests that reaching 4.5 million, even by lumping in non-tourists, could be a major stretch. Even with the liberalisation of the policy on border arrivals – foreign visitors can now enter at four crossings on the Thai border and continue to other parts of Myanmar – these are unlikely to grow fast enough to sustain 50pc growth in overall arrivals. PATA chief executive officer Mario Hardy said last week the target “may not be achievable” but that Myanmar is still expected to enjoy strong growth of about 20pc in overnight arrivals, which it expects to rise to 1.37 million.

But Ministry of Hotels and Tourism director U Myo Win Nyunt denied the target, saying it could be reached by upgrading airports, opening new border gates and promoting new destinations, such as the three Pyu cities that were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in June. Hotel room rates are also likely to moderate during the year, he said, due to the opening of new properties.

“We have more than 60,000 rooms in the whole country and also new hotels will open this year, so there will be no shortage as a result of growing tourist numbers and room prices won’t increase,” he said. Another uncertainty is Myanmar’s political situation, particularly given the general election is scheduled for the start of the peak tourist season. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s tourism boycott hobbled the industry for the best part of two decades, and political turbulence could again damp arrival numbers.

“Tourism is very sensitive and depends on the political situation,” said U Khin Aung Tun, secretary of the Myanmar Tourism Federation. “If the country lacks stability – whether it be because of politics, conflict, [human rights] abuses or disease – it will impact on the tourism industry.”

“I believe it would be more healthy – and responsible – for leisure tourism … to follow rather a conservative or mid-range [growth] scenario,”

Nicole Haasager
Myanmar Tourism Federation adviser
**Push for rapid growth has blurred long-term impacts for sector**

Tourism numbers have been on the rise since the country began to open up as the military regime gave way to democratisation following the 2010 election. The ministry also predicts about 5 million tourist arrivals for 2015, and it plans to open up more coastal areas and ethnic regions in addition to the traditionally popular destinations in the centre of the country, such as Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake.

"I think Myanmar is still considered an expensive destination, and the hotel room shortage remains, but a lot more hotels in different destinations are ready to open this year. I believe overall growth will continue in 2015," he said.

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IDPs urge UN rep to push for travel rights

WA LONE

walone14@gmail.com

DISPLACED persons living in camps in Rakhine State told the visiting UN special rapporteur for human rights last week that they want documents to allow them to leave the camps.

During her January 9 visit, Yanghee Lee heard that the IDPs have been living in the camp since communal violence broke out in 2012 and are forbidden to travel outside, leaving them with no access to jobs, education or healthcare.

“They call me Bengali or Rohingya, what I need is a citizenship card,” said Daw Cho, 49, who is active in women’s affairs in Taunggyi IDP camp, Myebon township.

Ms Lee met with Rakhine State Chief Minister U Maung Maung Ohn to discuss progress toward peace, stability and the rule of law, including the implementation of the Rakhine Action Plan. She also met with community leaders to discuss reconciliation efforts.

At a press conference on January 16, she said her discussions in the camp had illustrated that the citizenship issue is “more complex than the Rohingya/Bengali debate”.

“When I spoke to persons in the Myebon Muslim camp who had declined to participate in the citizenship verification process, they informed me it was because they were Kaman Muslims or Buddhists married to Muslims. They verified this by showing me their identity cards. Yet they could not leave the camp, either out of fear or lack of authority. This indicates the severe level of tension and fear that remains,” she said.

U Khin Soe, director general of the state’s Department of Immigration, said Ms Lee had asked about the status of citizenship for the

On January 14, the NGO Human Rights Watch urged President U Thein Sein to accept UN calls to amend the law that deprives many Rohingya Muslims of citizenship.

Under a government pilot project, more than 1000 people applied for citizenship last September, of which 209 have been granted full or naturalised citizenship under the 1982 law, including 46 identified as Bengalis and 169 as Kaman.

There remain more than 140,000 internally displaced Rohingya in camps throughout Rakhine State.

Lives of IDP camp residents not yet improved, concludes United Nations special rapporteur,

‘Much more is needed’ in

BILL O’TOOLE

botoole12@gmail.com

UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Yanghee Lee talks during a press conference in Yangon on January 16, 2014. Photo: AFP

UNited Nations human rights envoy Yanghee Lee has reiterated her warning that Myanmar is in danger of backsliding in some human rights areas, and again drew attention to the dire human rights situation in Rakhine State.

“I feel assured that in some areas, the government is continuing to progress in its reform program,” Ms Lee said on January 16, at the end of her second visit. “However, in some areas I have not observed progress since my last visit.

Ms Lee said her 10-day visit, which took her to Rakhine State, northern Shan State, Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw, featured “frank, open, sometimes passionate but always welcoming” discussions.

At the conclusion of her first visit in July 2014, Ms Lee made headlines when she warned that the government appeared to be “backsliding” in several areas of human rights.

In her remarks last week, Ms Lee doubled down on her assessment and urged the government to do much more to improve the human rights situation throughout the country.

In Rakhine State she visited IDP camps in Sittwe as well as Myebon, where the government recently conducted a citizenship verification pilot program.

Ms Lee met IDP residents who had received citizenship documents but said their “lives … have not changed.”

They remain inside the camp with minimum food rations, limited access to health care and to other essential services, she said.

While the government has allowed increased humanitarian access to IDP camps – NGOs can now visit the Myebon camp three times a week, instead of once – she said the situation “remains at crisis stage”.

“Humanitarian access is still minimal and high-risk,” she said.

She added that she had been promised a copy of the government’s updated Rakhine Action Plan but it had not yet been given to her.

Communal tension in Rakhine State has been one of the thorniest issues for Ms Lee and her predecessor Tomas Quintana, and both have been accused of bias toward the state’s Muslim population.

As her press conference was taking place, demonstrators gathered at Sule Pagoda to protest against this alleged bias. Ms Lee was also greeted by protesters on her arrival to Sittwe on January 8.

When asked about the demonstration, Ms Lee struck a diplomatic note, saying she took it as a heartening sign of freedom of expression.

She was less upbeat about the space for freedom of expression and assembly in her remarks, when she warned that “positive gains risk being lost.”

“Well, the possible signs of
Rakhine: UN calling the situation still at “crisis stage” after second visit

backtracking I noted in my first report have gained momentum in this area,” she said. As evidence, she pointed to several recent cases of peaceful demonstrators and activists being arrested or otherwise harassed, including protesters at the Let-padaung copper mine.

‘Positive gains risk being lost ... The possible signs of backtracking I noted in my first report have gained momentum.’

Yanghee Lee
UN special rapporteur

“At the end of 2014, official figures were that 27 political prisoners remained in prison. However, I consider that the 74 farmers charged with trespassing during land protests have also been arrested for politically motivated reasons,” she said.

The special rapporteur also highlighted the case of Brawn, who was killed during an encounter with a Tatmadaw patrol. Ms Lee said that, as a parent, she was “particularly touched” by his story.

“If Myanmar is truly serious about transitioning to democracy, it must allow persons aggrieved by its actions to express their frustrations without being punished,” she said.

In her comments on the national ceasefire process, Ms Lee said the government remains “confident” that the accord can be signed in February, and urged all sides to compromise for the greater good.

However, she said the actions of both sides in conflict areas, particularly Kachin State, risked undermining the agreement.

“The stepping-up of attacks in Kachin State over this past month is not conducive to negotiation of a comprehensive ceasefire agreement.”

While Ms Lee was originally scheduled to visit several IDP camps in northern Shan State, she said that some of these trips had to be cancelled at the last minute due to security concerns.

Ms Lee will submit her full findings in a report to the Human Rights Council in March.

Rakhine party to shun international dialogue

Accusing the United Nations and other international groups of bias, the Rakhine National Party says it will no longer cooperate on Rakhine State-related issues

Ei Ei Toe Lwin
eioteolwin@gmail.com

THE Rakhine National Party will boycott international organisations it believes are biased in favour of Muslims, party chief U Aye Maung told The Myanmar Times last week. He also accused the United Nations of interfering in Myanmar’s internal affairs over the issue of inter-communal violence.

On January 13, the party formally conveyed its decision to Rakhine State Chief Minister U Aye Maung. Meanwhile, the RNP urged local residents, including monks, to boycott international organisations operating in the state. The party – which holds a majority of elected seats in the Rakhine State Hluttaw, as well as 14 Rakhine State-based seats in the national parliament – has instructed its members to accept the state’s Muslims as citizens.

Protesters wait for Yanghee Lee in Sittwe on January 8. (Photo: Than Tun/Sittwe)

On her second tour of Myanmar, Ms Lee travelled to Rakhine State to assess whether conditions had changed since her first visit, in July 2014. She was greeted at Sittwe airport by hundreds of demonstrators, who had waited throughout the afternoon for her delayed flight to arrive.

On January 30, she met with local people and authorities at the Emergency Coordination Centre – a body comprising representatives of the government, Rakhine civil society and international NGOs – to urge them to respect the human rights of people living in displaced persons camps.

“Their human rights are being violated. We demand the international community to remove the concentration camps on the state border,” said Nwe Oo, a local human rights activist.

On January 10, she met with local residents to discuss issues including the recent attack on IDP camps.

The government responded by reiterating its stance that there are no “Rohingya” people in Myanmar – it refers to them as Bengalis – and that citizenship issues should be resolved in accordance with the 1982 Citizenship Law. U Aye Maung accused Ms Lee of interfering in Myanmar’s internal affairs.

“Ms Lee is acting as an advocate for the Rakhine State government, which is trying, through measures to improve the situation in the state, to have the United Nations’ special rapporteur issues a fair report.”

Ei Ei Toelwin
Calls grow for release of dirty drinking water names

Alpine owner urges FDA to take action against unsafe brands, while FDA chief distances himself from findings

Pressure is growing on the Food and Drug Administration to make public a secret report on Yangon’s dirty drinking water. FDA researchers discovered two years ago that 44 percent of popular drinking water brands in Yangon were contaminated with dangerous bacteria, but the results were revealed only last month at a health conference.

Now the owner of soft drinks giant Loi Hein, which produces market leader Alpine drinking water, has published scientific research and taken immediate action to ensure the safety of drinking water.

Dr Sai Sam Htun told the Myanmar Times last week he found it “unbelievable” that consumers were drinking contaminated water because although FDA researchers had found bacteria in samples the FDA had refused to name the brands concerned.

“Water is essential for a healthy life. People need to know that the water they drink is pure. The FDA should take immediate action to ensure this,” he said.

Consumer Protection Association chair Dr Su Quin also called on the FDA to name the brands of water found to be tainted. “Why has the FDA kept this quiet for so long? We’ve been drinking dirty drinking water for two years,” he said, adding that the association had received complaints about water quality.

The matter came to light at the 43rd Myanmar Health Research Congress, held from January 5 to 9, when FDA researchers revealed they had found that nearly half the purified water on sale in Yangon was dangerous to health.

The study of 50 brands of 20-litre bottles of purified drinking water was conducted between April 2012 and March 2013. It found that only 28 brands met health standards, while 22 – or 44 percent of the total – were unsatisfactory because of bacteriological contamination.

The study used 92 samples collected from across Yangon townships, according to FDA official Daw Thin Su Kyaw, who conducted the research with eight colleagues. The research was carried out at the FDA laboratory and Yangon University of Medicine. The 22 brands ruled unsatisfactory failed FDA standard tests, with some found to contain E. coli bacteria.

Dr Daw Thin Su Kyaw attributed the problem to poor hygiene of staff involved in bottling, sealing, storage and transportation of the part of staff engaged in the filling, pegging, sealing, storage and transportation of the bottles.

Dr Su Quin added it was difficult to control.

“The staff involved in bottling, sealing, storage and transportation of the bottles must be carefully selected and trained,” he said.

He defended the FDA’s efforts to control the bottling industry. “The FDA has refused to say how many brands failed the quality tests, but we don’t know why,” she said, adding that she thought the FDA should release the names of the dirty water companies.

Food, cosmetics testing lab to open in Nay Pyi Taw

A testing laboratory to ensure product quality is being built in Nay Pyi Taw, the government has announced. The lab, which will test domestically produced foodstuffs and cosmetics, is attached to the Research and Development Section of the Small-scale Industries Department, Ministry of Cooperatives.

U Swe Tun, director of the department, said he hoped the lab would be operational by September. “Construction will be complete in May, and then we will install the equipment,” he said.

The laboratory will test products from neighbouring Magpye and Bago regions and Shan State, including Yedsahe, Taungwin, Paukphum and Paukphum Union townships. At present the ministry has laboratories in Yangon and Mandalay to test products prior to distribution, as well as market samples.

“We test products for which registration is sought under small-scale industries regulations. The law requires us to inform the manufacturers if we have a question about the ingredients,” he said.

Imported goods and other products produced by large manufacturers are tested by Food and Drug Administration laboratories.

Research and development labs examine soft drinks, jams and jellies, pickled tea leaves, fish paste, oil and oil products, and milk and dairy products from small-scale industries, as well as cosmetics and commodities.

Many small-scale industries produce traditional goods whose ingredients may contain chemicals that could attract the department’s attention.

U Khin Maung Lwin, who sells foodstuffs in Pyinnyama township, Nay Pyi Taw, said there were no tests on such products that are not tested. “In summer, for example, iced lollies go on sale,” he said, “but nobody knows where they come from or what they contain.” – The New Nation
An ethnic Kachin woman attends the opening ceremony of the Manaw Festival in Myitkyina, Kachin State, on January 8. The celebration of traditional Kachin culture was last held in 2011, with subsequent years seeing cancellations due to conflict in the area between government troops and ethnic armed groups. The revival of the January 8-11 festival this year was opposed by some Myitkyina residents, who believed it was inappropriate to hold the event until after peace has returned to the region.

### Crackdown begins on errant monks

**AUNG KYAW MIN**

MORE than 40 mendicant clergy, including impostors masquerading as Buddhist monks, have been detained following a crackdown by religious authorities against fraudsters profiting from public veneration for monks.

The crackdown was launched last month after a spate of reports of shaven-headed men in clerical robes soliciting money under false pretenses, particularly in tourist areas. Some would change back into ordinary clothes and go home to their families at night, while others slept in gangs at the railway station.

Another version of the scam involved abbots sending novice monks from the countryside into Yangon's popular tourist sites and then taking the money they received back to the abbot. Such activities are illegal under laws protecting the status of religion.

"Monks would go around town begging and then take a break in the teashop. Some were seen soliciting alms at Sule Pagoda. They come to downtown Yangon from towns in the countryside," said U Su-rundhana, a member of the Pabedan township Sangha Rules Preservation Committee.

"The Sangha Rules Preservation Committee arrested 30 monks who were sleeping at Yangon railway station. These monks are not attached to a monastery," said U Gunarlinkarra, the deputy chair of Yangon Region Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee.

"They go round town begging for food, then they drink alcohol and sleep in the station."

By January 5, less than two weeks after the crackdown was launched, 43 errant monks or imposters had been detained, the deputy chair said, adding that the figure could rise when additional information came in from outlying townships.

### Parties to join forces for Kayah State vote

THREE parties based in or near Kayah State have decided to work together to increase their chances of success in the elections scheduled for later this year. The Kayan National Party (KNP), the Kayah Unity Democracy Party (KUDP) and the All Nationals Democracy Party Kayah State (AND) have formally agreed to stand as an alliance following a tri-party meeting last week in Kayah State.

Spokespersons for the parties said their cooperation was aimed at securing important government positions.

"We have come up with the conclusion of uniting as an alliance. Politically, our cooperation will be important as a way of gaining more seats in the state government," said KUDP chair U Saw Daniel.

The focus of the agreement is to avoid running candidates in the same constituencies, which under Myanmar’s first-past-the-post voting system would likely harm their chances of winning. Despite the accord, U Solomon of the AND said some matters were still subject to negotiation.

"There is give and take, but exactly how to do so on a formal political platform is yet to be discussed... When selecting candidates and constituencies, we will go step by step," he said. "In Loikaw and Demawso, the Kayan population is quite strong.”

Although the KUDP and the AND are based in Kayah State, the KNP has its headquarters in southern Shan State’s Pekon township.

KNP chair U Khu Eugen said Kayah State was a focus for his party as ethnic Kayan people are the second-largest ethnic group there. "Historically, Kayan people have always been active in politics. We want to participate in state-building in Kayah State," he said.

One resident welcomed the emergence of the alliance. “I hope their cooperation will benefit the ... people of Kayah State," said Loikaw resident U Aung Naing Oo. – Lun Min Mong

IN PICTURES

PHOTO: THANDAR KHINE

An ethnic Kachin woman attends the opening ceremony of the Manaw Festival in Myitkyina, Kayah State, on January 8. The celebration of traditional Kachin culture was last held in 2011, with subsequent years seeing cancellations due to conflict in the area between government troops and ethnic armed groups. The celebration of traditional Kachin culture was last held in 2011, with subsequent years seeing cancellations due to conflict in the area between government troops and ethnic armed groups.

The revival of the January 8-11 festival this year was opposed by some Myitkyina residents, who believed it was inappropriate to hold the event until after peace has returned to the region.

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US rights rep cautions MPs over religion bills

Also urges “non-discriminatory” citizenship assessment in Rakhine following visit

EI E TOE LWIN
eieltowin@gmail.com

TOP United States human rights official Tom Malinowski has warned that the divisive use of religion in upcoming elections would be “playing with fire.” Speaking on January 16 at the end of a six-day visit, he said a proposed package of religious laws put forward by Buddhist nationalists could also inflame tensions between religious groups.

He urged MPs to reject the laws, which would place restrictions on interfaith marriage and religious conversion.

“We expressed a concern that the use of religion, in particular to divide people whether it is done for political or any other purposes, is incredibly dangerous, particularly in an election year,” Mr. Malinowski said.

“We expressed a concern that this is really playing with fire and exposes the country to dangers that it is not prepared to handle.”

The US human rights official’s trip coincided with the 10-day visit to Myanmar of UN special rapporteur on human rights Yanghee Lee, who also expressed concern over religious law drafts.

The bills, which are likely to be discussed during the parliament session that begins on January 19, have been widely critcized by local and international rights groups, who say they fail to meet international human rights norms.

On the issue of Rakhine State, Mr Malinowski said he asked the government to establish a “non-discriminatory” pathway to allow minority people in Rakhine State to obtain citizenship.

“The question we suggested in assessing citizenship should not be, ‘What is your race?’ It should not be, ‘What is your colour?’ [or] ‘What is your religion?’ It should be, ‘What are you prepared to do to help build this country?’” he said.

He also called for humanitarian groups to be granted to those affected by conflict in Kachin State and northern Shan State as soon as possible.

“Whenever you blame for this conflict, whatever your interpretation for why this is happening, IDPs should not be punished.”

The delegation led by Mr Malinowski visited Kachin State and met with civil societies in Yangon before taking part in the “US-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue” in Nay Pyi Taw on January 16 and 17.

The two sides discussed a full range of human rights issues and democratic reforms, he said, including political prisoners, media freedom, land rights, protecting civilians in conflict areas, legal and constitutional reforms, combating discrimination and military reforms.

He described the dialogue as “extremely constructive and productive” but acknowledged concerns about the reform process and human rights-related issues.

“Whoever you blame for this conflict, whatever your interpretation for why this is happening, IDPs should not be punished.”

He also urged “non-discriminatory” citizenship assessment in Rakhine following visit.
Budget concerns hobble pension expansion proposal

Pension planned for over-65s could be limited to just centenarians because of fears it will blow the budget

HTOO THANHThanhtoo.spt@gmail.com

A PLAN to pay a monthly pension to the elderly may initially be restricted to people aged over 100 - because there is not enough money in the budget to pay everyone over 65, as the government had initially proposed.

The exact numbers and proportions of over-65s and -100s will be known more clearly in May, when the final results of last year’s census are published.

The pension scheme is part of a national-level strategic social protection plan to be launched in April, said Daw San San Aye, deputy director general of the Department of Social Welfare of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement.

TRILLION KYAT

1.145 Estimated budget in 2015-16 for a social protection plan for the elderly

The plan aims to provide a secure income for the elderly, taking into account their medical needs, and was originally intended to provide K25,000 a month to every citizen over the age of 65.

But Daw San San Aye told The Myanmar Times in an exclusive interview last week that it would be restricted initially to people aged over 100 because of insufficient funds.

The plan has allocated K1.145 trillion (US$117 billion) for the social pension program in 2015-16, including existing civil service pensions. “The pension amount was originally set in the plan at K25,000 a month, but if it is limited to those over 100 years then they will almost certainly receive more than that,” she said, declining to state an exact figure.

Retired civil servants will receive the national pension in addition to their civil service pensions, said Daw San San Aye. She said the pension program was initially supposed to focus only on poorer people, but the government decided that the expense and complexity of means-testing made it cheaper and simpler to pay everybody. “Maybe K25,000 is not significant for the rich but it will be a good support for the poor,” she said.

While welcoming the plan to pay pensions to all older people, Amyotha Hluttaw MP U Phone Myint Aung said it was not enough to only pay pensions to those over 100 years of age.

“I hope it will be approved because if elderly people do not have enough income they cannot be healthy and will become a financial burden on their families,” he said.

“I think it should be for all over-65s, and we need to offer them other types of support too. But if the government doesn’t have enough money, I think it should be limited to over-75s instead… If we all gladly support the plan.”

Daw Moe Moe, of Nay Pyi Taw’s Lewe township, who takes care of her aged mother, said a K25,000-a-month pension could be really useful for poorer families. “Daily wage labourers earn barely K3000 a day,” she said.

The program has already been approved by the government, and is now being scrutinised by the Union financial commission, which will decide whether or not to apply it to all those aged 65 and older, or just to people aged over 100.

On Independence Day, 569 persons aged 100 and over received a K200,000 bonus funded by a 25 percent cut applied to the monthly allowances of the president, vice presidents, Union ministers and their deputies.

According to a forecast produced in connection with the 2014 International Day of Older Persons, 1pc of Myanmar’s population is aged 60 or over, and the proportion is expected to rise to 1.5pc by 2060.

U Kyaw Lin Htet, deputy director of Department of Social Welfare, said that figures could change when the results of the March 2014 census are released. “That figure was calculated by United Nations based on a population of 44 million but the 2014 census found a population of just over 51 million,” he said.

“We will know the percentage of people aged 65 or older in April when the census results come out.”

The plan anticipates that the population of older persons will increase to 3.5 million by 2060, requiring expenditures of 1.3pc of GDP. Currently, Myanmar spends less than 0.5pc on social protection and other services, the lowest in the Asean region. Almost all of that goes to civil service pensions.

A former civil servant collects his pension after the government raised payments dramatically in 2011. Photo: Staff

Market vendors protest lottery for new stalls

SI THU LWINSithu.lwin.mmtimes@gmail.com

STALLHOLDERS in the old Thit Vadaung Market in Mandalay Region’s Pyin Oo Lwin township say they are prepared to demonstrate against a plan that would deny many of them places in the new market unless they win a lottery.

Of the more than 400 retailers doing business in the temporary market, only 220 have been allocated stalls in the new market now under construction. Others will have to draw lots for the chance of a place, along with outsiders who now have no stalls.

U Soe Win, deputy chair of the market stallholders’ committee, said last week that the retailers had originally been promised places in the new market. “But now some vendors will have to draw lots for a permit to buy a stall, as if they were outsiders.”

The new market, located on a municipal-owned 1.6 hectare (4-acre) site near Thit Pyadawr bus terminal in Pyin Oo Lwin new town, is expected to open in June with a total of 934 shops of varying sizes.

“We want to allocate stalls according to the goods they sell. The smaller spaces are not suitable for larger goods, but the chief minister didn’t respond to our complaint about the inconvenience. We also approached the township management committee for assistance. Retailers will demonstrate if there is no change in their position,” said Daw Mon Mon Shin, secretary of the market committee.

But the assistant director of Pyin Oo Lwin City Development Committee, U Khin Maung Thit, refused a request to discuss the matter over the phone. “If you want to know about the market, you have to come to Pyin Oo Lwin in person,” he said.

Depending on size, a vendor’s plot can cost from K1.5 million to K9 million. Only stallholders granted an allocation have the right to buy. The stalls will be sold on instalments, with a 50 percent down payment and subsequent payments of 10pc monthly.

Translation by Zin Zin Min Htoon
Jan 12 talks ‘a waste of time’: opposition

Almost 50 people took part in the government-organised meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, with talks focusing on the peace process and constitution

Opposition parties have criticised President U Thein Sein for calling a meeting of nearly 50 political leaders, describing it as another effort to avoid six-way talks.

The meeting at the president’s residence in Nay Pyi Taw on January 12 brought together 46 individuals, including the president, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Union Election Commission chair U Tin Aye, leaders of registered political parties and 28 ethnic affairs ministers.

Participants focused on three topics: the transition to democracy; political dialogue with armed ethnic groups; and a general election planned for later this year. Each was given five minutes to discuss the three topics, and most focused on the peace process, amending the 2008 constitution and issues related to a proposed federal union political system.

The seven-hour meeting took place a week before the start of the next Pyidaungsu Hluttaw session, and some participants said the president was trying to deflect attention away from parliament’s proposal for six-way talks.

In November, MPs passed a proposal for a meeting between U Thein Sein, Thura U Shwe Mann, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, U Tin Aye, National League for Democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and an ethnic minority leader, later identified as Rakhine National Party chief U Aye Maung.

‘These meetings should not be held to avoid six-way talks.’

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
NLD leader

The President’s Office will be forced to reply to the proposal after the session opens on January 19. The government has said it prefers “all-inclusive” discussions with a larger number of participants, but its opponents say this is a tactic to ensure the meetings yield no results.

Participants at the January 12 meeting said there were no “tangible” results and no common agreement between the government and opposition groups on key issues, including which sections of the constitution should be amended as a priority and whether to proceed with the signing of a proposed nationwide ceasefire if not all armed ethnic groups agree to sign.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said it was a “general meeting” and she was “unclear on the basic purpose”.

“That meeting is not like the six-way talks. The ethnic ministers, who are members of the [regional] governments, were also involved, although they are neither leaders of political parties nor members of parliament.

“As I said before, these meetings should not be held to avoid six-way talks,” she said.

However, Chin ethnic affairs minister for Sagaing Region U No Htan Khet said he was “very satisfied” with the meeting.

Most participants said the president’s aim was to delay six-way talks, and that the meeting was a way to avoid pressure from Six-Way talks.

He said the reason no joint statement was released at the end of the talks was because some were against a proposal to hold a follow-up meeting.

“When the question was asked about holding another meeting, most agreed to it but 20 people disagreed,” said U No Htan Khet. U Khun Htun Oo, leader of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, said the large number of participants made the meeting “a waste of time”.

“I won’t attend another meeting if there is unlikely to be any tangible result,” he said.

However, presidential spokesperson U Ei Ei To rejected these criticisms at a press conference following the meeting and insisted that the president was not trying to avoid a six-way talks.

“The president arranged the meeting [this way] because he wanted it to be all-inclusive,” he said.

Yangon court rejects suit over Kempinski-linked hotel

YE MON
yemonun2013@gmail.com

YANGON Region High Court has rejected an application to use the Myanmar Investment Commission, Yangon’s chief minister and private investors over a controversial hotel project on Strand Road linked to global hotel chain Kempinski.

The decision, announced in the first week of January, was the second time the court had refused an application from the Lawyers’ Network to file a case under section 43 of the Specific Relief Act.

“It comes as one of the companies behind the project, Flying Tiger, revealed it had hired a heritage consulting firm, Purcell, to draft a conservation management plan for the site – a move seemingly aimed at addressing concerns the overhaul will not respect the building’s original features and purpose,”

Advocate U Kyee Myint, a member of the Lawyers’ Network, said the court ignored “no reason for throwing out the case and the network plans to submit another application this month.”

“Think there is so much corruption in the judiciary. The court should have told me what the reason for rejecting this case was,” said U Kyee Myint.

In November 2014, U Kyee Myint, together with an international lawyer, lodged complaints against Yangon Region Chief Minister U Myint Swe, former head of the Myanmar Investment Commission U Zeyar Aung and two private Myanmar-owned companies, Flying Tiger Engineering Company and Prime Residence over the proposed hotel.

Flying Tiger won a tender in 2012 to turn the Small Claims Court on Strand Road into a five-star hotel. According to a letter that the president sent to parliament in July 2012, annual rent will be 7 percent of hotel revenue, while the company will also pay a fee of US$14.4 million for land use and invest at least K20 billion. The company is also prohibited from making major alterations to the original structure.

In December, Flying Tiger said it would submit a conservation management plan to the non-profit Yangon Heritage Trust for review.

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Flying Tiger managing director U Thaung Htun Min said last week his company had commissioned Hong Kong-based Purcell to draft the conservation management plan, which is due for completion next month.

However, the project has faced opposition since the tender results were announced. In October 2012, the Lawyers’ Network staged a protest against the project, arguing it was not appropriate to repurpose a court as a hotel. A second protest was held in May 2014 but work has continued at the site.

In July last year, Flying Tiger officials told The Myanmar Times they had reached an agreement with Swiss chain Kempinski AG under which the building would open in 2017 as the Kempinski Yangon with 209 rooms.

In October, Thailand’s Siam Commercial Bank announced it was providing 600 million in financial support for the renovation of the building.

The motion reported that the renovation will be handled jointly by Thailand-based Kanok Furniture and Decoration and Myanmar’s JL Group, which is the parent company of Flying Tiger.

“The renovation is in preparation for tourism and service industry growth in Myanmar, with the project slated for completion by 2016,” the bank was quoted as saying.

Thailand Crown Property Bureau is the single largest shareholder in SCB and also has a majority holding in Kempinski.

A member of the Lawyers’ Network leads a protest against a hotel project in Yangon on October 2012. Photo: Ko Taik
CRIME IN BRIEF

Father Land owner in court

The owner of Father Land Construc-
tion, U Kyaw Myint, appeared in a
Kyakkhta courtroom on January 13
facing charges of cheating and forgery.
Landowner U Soe Min Htet filed a
case against U Kyaw Myint in Sep-
tember after hiring him to develop a
12-story building on a 100-by-60-foot
lot on the middle block of Pansodan
Street, Kyakkhta, four years ago.
U Kyaw Myint allegedly forged the
signature of the land owner and
construction remains incomplete.
In a separate case, Betthaungo police
say he is being charged with misusing
K300 million in funds.

U Kyaw Myint, who has previously
abandoned periodically from court
hearings, is scheduled to return to
court on January 28. Yangon’s Western
District Court has rescheduled the case
files, but the township judge said no
applications for a change of venue has
yet been made.

Teacher hospitalised after robbery

Kamaryut police were called on
January 28 to a hospital, where a
Teacher at a high school was
hospitalised after an attempted
robbery.

Taxi goes over railing

A taxi plunged off a bridge on January 8,
sending the driver and passengers to the
top of the river. The driver sustained
injuries to his right thigh, while passengers U
Tin Aung and Daw Thaw Tin Myint of
Thingangyun township received
multiple injuries and were rushed to
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Developer: Golden Land Real Estate Development Co., Ltd.
Myanmar’s 180 state-run vocational schools will be given a new focus to support the needs of employers

VOCATIONAL education and training institutes are to be realigned with the needs of the private sector under a proposed reform plan. The Ministry of Science and Technology, said the plans had not been finalised but there is a “strong possibility” it will be implemented.

The Ministry of Science and Technology is taking the lead in the project, together with the Ministries of hotels and tourism, social welfare, relief and resettlement, livestock, fisheries and rural development, construction, and education, as well as the Ministry of Cooperatives.

Input was also received from the ministries of commerce, industry, environmental conservation and forestry, border affairs, and agriculture and irrigation. In December, officials visited the regions where the institutes are to be established to hold talks with regional governments to get suggestions on how to improve the training programs.

Last April, a committee chaired by Minister for Science and Technology U Ko Ko Oo was formed to develop the technical education sector in line with the government’s national education policy. The committee has been drawing up a draft education law covering agriculture, livestock, industry, mining, energy, trading, investment and services, in consultation with partner organisations, including donors.

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training bill is due to be submitted to parliament during the upcoming session, which begins on January 19.

The committee was also put in charge of setting direction for existing state-run vocational training institutes, which had previously been run independently of each other by individual ministries.

There are more than 180 state-run education and training institutes across the country, with 24 in Sagaing Region alone. Mandalay Region has 23, while Ayeyarwady Region has seven, and Rakhine State only six.

It remains unclear whether these schools would remain under their current names or shifted to a single ministry, such as the Ministry of Science and Technology.

But U Win Tha, the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Thabaung in Ayeyarwady Region, said the government’s “upgrading” vocational education and training system was sorely in need of an overhaul.

He said the sector’s focus should be on enabling young people and those without a formal education to get the skills necessary to secure a job, while at the same time developing the human resources needed for the country’s development.

“This would help to increase their income and in turn reduce poverty,” he said.

The committee has also been listing training institutes run by private companies in the states and regions in an effort to meet demand from foreign investors for skilled workers. The interest is to issue certificates that would be recognised by other ASEAN countries.

— Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Mogul residents urge upkeep of historic British war cemetery

Memorial stones dating to the late 19th century — shortly after the final Anglo-Burmese War — have fallen into disrepair at the British military cemetery in Ywar Thar Yar, Mandalay Region.

“Since foreign visitors were allowed to visit Mogul, more and more foreigners come to the cemetery almost every day” Pan Lin ward administrator U Chit Aung said.

But the cemetery is no longer in good condition. Soil erosion from mining works in the area is ruining the land and its memorial stones.

Myanmar hosts three well-known British World War II military graveyards, near Hantawaddy Roundabout in Yangon, at Thaketaung north of Yangon and at Thanhbyuzayat in Mon State. These hold Allied dead from the two World Wars, and are carefully maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The site at Ywar Thar Yar, however, goes back a half-century earlier, to the 1880s and 90s.

It memorialises soldiers who fell in the aftermath of the third and final Anglo-Burmese War, which sparked a long-running insurgency against colonial rule.

U Chit Aung said that so far no one from Myanmar or abroad has taken official action to prevent damage to this site. If it was protected, he said, it could become an attraction and bring an economic boost to the area.

Previously off-limits, Mogul opened to foreign tourism in 2013. While visitors still require government permission, this can be attained relatively easily through Myanmar Travels and Tours.

U Maung, 72, said only 20 of the gravestones remain, and that residents have taken responsibility themselves for rejuvenating the site.

“In order to make the cemetery look beautiful like before, locals have cleared bushes and thorns as much as possible,” he said, adding it would be better if authorities stepped in and took over.

Ywar Thar Yar was called Bernard- myo, after British commissioner of Upper Burma Sir Charles Bernard, until it was officially renamed by the former military government.

— Translation by Zar Zar Soe

Police arrest five with alleged links to mystery terrorist group

YANGON police have arrested five men accused of illegally importing 4,550 kilograms (30,000 pounds) of potassium nitrate, the active ingredient in gunpowder. Police say the men have links to a terrorist group and previously helped the outfit buy weapons.

Police initially arrested three men — a 55-year-old man from Kayin State’s Kawkhin township; a 61-year-old man from Yangon’s Min galat Taung Nyunt township; and a 42-year-old man from Yangon’s Kyauktada township — who are accused of hiding 182 25-kilogram bags of potassium nitrate in a Tarmwe township apartment. They have been charged under an import law.

The men later confessed to purchasing a number of weapons in support of a terrorist group based in Kayin State’s Myawady township that police said is called ‘Al Yankee’. Police provided no further information on the group.

The men said they supplied the group with six AK-47 assault rifles, six M16 rifles, four carbines, two 40mm grenade launchers, one 45-calibre pistol, one rocket-propelled grenade launcher and 20 hand grenades.

Police said the trio had received a grant for training in Thailand, along with two other men — a 34-year-old man from Pyaymana township in Nya Pyi Taw and a 27-year-old man from Yangon’s Tarmwe township — who were also arrested.

Major Kyaw Zaw Aung of national intelligence unit Military Affairs Security opened the case on January 8.

— Translation by Thiri Min Htun
Rights commission urges charges against Sagaing police

POLICE bullets killed a local resident who died in a protest that turned violent last month, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission has announced. Daw Khin Win, 57, was shot dead and nine Chinese workers and 11 villagers wounded in clashes that broke out as local villagers pursued the victim's sister-in-law, Ms. Hla Hla Sein of Myanmar Economic Cooperating, a military-owned company.

The commission's January 14 investigation report urged the government to take effective action against the police for failing to abide by approved security procedures in suppressing the December 22 protest, which erupted as workers for the China-backed Wanbao company tried to fence off farmland in preparation for an expansion of the project.

The report cited medical evidence that Daw Khin Win died from a gunshot wound to the head. Now, on instructions from the authorities of Sagaing Region's Salinги township, the local police have stepped in to suspend a court action launched by the victim's sister-in-law, Daw Khin Mar Aye. "The police are saying it's not important if people are executed," she said.

Daw Khin Mar Aye's complaint cites U Hla Sein of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEH), Gang Yoe and Lao Ziu of Wanbao, Police Colonel U Nye Tun of Sagaing Region, Police Major U Tin Moe of Ywathu township, Pol Major U Aung Kyaw of Sagaing Region and Sagaing Region Minister for Security and Border Affairs U Aung Reiky. Sagaing Region police were responsible for the security of the fencing operation.

"We should resolve this issue quickly because residents are very afraid," said PCG coordinator U La Maing Gun Jar.

U Aung Thein of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) said they were negotiating with the victim's sister-in-law, Daw Khin Mar Aye. "The police are saying it's not important if people are executed," she said.

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The KIA said the fighting started at 6:30am in Kanse village, near the base of the KIA's No 6 Battalion, with an artillery attack by the Tatmadaw. "Hundreds of local people are seeking the protection of the church," said U Daung Khai, the leader of the KIO technical team in Myikyina.

"We should resolve this issue quickly because residents are very afraid," U La Maing Gun Jar said.

U Zaw Htun, a director in the President's Office, said he had no information on the clashes and declined further comment.

U Hla Maung Shwe, senior advisor to the Peace-talks Creation Group (PCG), said they were negotiating with the Kachin State government, the Kachin Independence Organisation technical team and Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) to resolve the conflict. "We should resolve this issue quickly because residents are very afraid," said PCG coordinator U La Maing Gun Jar.

On January 14, several sources in the region said the clashes started when police bodies were responsible for the security of the fencing operation.

Civil society submits suggestions on election observers

CIVIL society organisations have submitted proposed changes to a draft code of conduct and registration process for electoral observers to the Union Election Commission.

The UEC distributed the drafts during a meeting with election-focused civil society groups in Yangon in December 2014 and invited feedback.

Daw Zin Mar On of the Myanmar Network For Free Elections said her organisation submitted both comments and suggested changes.

"For example, a section of the draft says observers need to register 15 days before election day. That's not enough – the period should be extended," she said.

Daw Zin Mar On said her organisation also disagrees with a provision that requires registered groups to submit a report after the election to the UEC outlining what they observed. "DOEs are not working under the UEC. We are independent," she said.

U Than Sin of the New Myanmar Foundation said his group had suggested several changes but declined to give specifics.

During the December meeting, election commission officials promised to consider suggestions from civil society when finalising the draft.

The UEC said in a statement early last month that the election would be held in October or November.

Tumiday, KIA clash in Hpakan

YE MON
yeemonyan2013@gmail.com
LUN MIN MANG
lumnin.imrd@gmail.com

VIOLENT clashes broke out anew between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) near Hpakan on January 15, several sources in the region said.

The fighting erupted as the KIA detained the Kachin State minister for transport and his three-man police bodyguard during an inspection tour of the area. The minister has now been released, but the three police officers are being held by the KIA.

The area is a jade-rich region of Kachin State about 130 kilometres (80 miles) northwest of Myitkyina. Local people say the Tatmadaw wants to secure the mines for Myanmar Economic Cooperating, a military-owned company.

The UEC said in a statement early last month that the election would be held in October or November.
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At Kyaikhtyo, wildlife trade on open display

Traditional medicines and a goat’s head (below) are displayed for sale at stalls in Kyaikhtyo. 

Julia Niggbrugge
Visitor to Kyaikhtyo

At Kyaikhtyo, the impact of the illegal trade in animals is clear in other ways. The area was once home to a range of animals that have since become rare due to hunting; sambar deer, barking deer and wild pig for food, and bears and snakes for medical purposes. However, improvements in transport over the past 20 years have made it much more accessible, leading to an explosion in visitor numbers.

While tigers are now only found in remote areas, U Maung Maung, a former wildlife ranger, said he had not seen one for some time. “We spend the night on Yethay Rock. When we arrive at their shops, they just display the fake products,” he said. U Hay Hnin, the chair of the pagoda’s board of trustees, said that officials at Kyaikhtyo collaborate with forestry officials to control the wildlife trade but some traders may sell products when they are not watching.

“Do not allow the killing or selling of any wildlife in the 696-acre religious zone, which begins near base camp,” he said. “But some cases may be missed.”

He said that traders allow traditional medicine shops at Kyaikhtyo and that these can sometimes be mistaken for wildlife traders because they display snakes or the heads of rams to attract customers.

“We let the shop owners know that the wildlife trade is illegal. We also discussed several times with the pagoda trustees, who rent the spaces to the shops, to try and get their cooperation to control the trade, but no one cares,” said the official, who asked not to be named.

Raiders have also proved ineffective, he said, because vendors learn of the authorities’ plans in advance and hide their genuine animal parts from view.

“We spend the night on Yethay Rock. When we arrive at their shops, they just display the fake products,” he said.

Julia Niggbrugge
Visitor to Kyaikhtyo

We were shocked that it was so openly conducted … Obviously, the vendors are not concerned about repercussions.”

AYE SAPAY PHYU

THE END OF THE RAINY SEASON B Brings with it a business boom at Kyaikhtyo Pagoda in Mon State, as thousands of pilgrims and tourists descend to pay homage at the site known as Golden Rock.

But between the food and souvenir shops selling bamboo toys and fruit jam, there is another, darker trade taking place, in the body parts of endangered animals.

Items on offer – normally sold as ingredients for traditional medicine – include the remains of elephants, snakes, sambar deer, barking deer and bears.

Julia Niggbrugge, an expatriate from Germany, said she had been “shocked” at how openly body parts of endangered species were on sale at the pagoda.

"We spent the night on Yethay Rock. When we arrived at their shops, they just display the fake products,” he said. U Hay Hnin, the chair of the pagoda’s board of trustees, said that officials at Kyaikhtyo collaborate with forestry officials to control the wildlife trade but some traders may sell products when they are not watching.

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Hidden murals revealed at Ananda

An India-backed project is removing layers of lime from Ananda Pagoda’s whitewashed walls – the legacy of an ill-advised restoration campaign

PAINSTAKING work to strip off layers of lime to reveal ancient murals is proceeding at Bagan’s Ananda Temple, halfway into a six-year project being undertaken by the Myanmar and Indian governments. The project aims to restore and preserve the temple’s artwork – and undo the damage done by an ill-advised restoration campaign launched two decades ago.

The murals were whitewashed from 1975 as part of a military government-initiated restoration program that has been described by some archaeologists as “catastrophic.” Along with whitewashing, pagodas were renovated with commercial materials and in some cases completely rebuilt, often on top of the original foundations.

The program was partly responsible for Bagan being left off UNESCO’s World Heritage List. In 2005, a UNESCO official told the International Herald Tribune that “a Disney-style fantasy version of one of the world’s great religious and historical sites is being created by (the military) government. . . . They use the wrong materials to build wrongly shaped structures on top of magnificent ancient stupas.”

Government officials defended the works as being in line with the wishes of private and commercial Myanmar donors, who helped fund the program.

In 2010, the Myanmar and Indian governments signed an agreement to restore Ananda in line with international standards and more than US$3 million has been allocated to the project, according to the Indian embassy in Yangon. A team from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is working at the site alongside staff from the Ministry of Culture.

Department of Archaeology, National Museum and Library deputy director U Soe Soe Lin said the Indian team was providing help on chemical and structural conservation.

The team checks the lime-painted walls to assess the possible presence of a mural beneath. In some places, there are four layers of lime above the artwork. “In some places murals have been revealed and cleaned. There is much more to be done,” he said.

Lime has already been removed from the lower and upper precincts, a drainage channel, and the inner spaces of the four corner gates, one at each point of the compass. A waterproofing system has been installed in the upper precinct, iron grids fixed to the windows to keep out birds, and tiered roofs restored at Thagyar Paya and Tha Saung Paya, two smaller pagodas in the Ananda compound.

The work also entails repairing marble slabs at the northeast and southwest platforms, replanting the lawn at the northeast corner, and strengthening the corner walls.

The pagoda, built in 1055 AD, is one of four surviving temples in Bagan constructed during the reign of King Kyanzittha (1084-1113).

Murals on the walls of Ananda Pagoda have been uncovered through a project to remove layers of lime applied following an earthquake in 1975. Photo: Myo Swe Than

Murals at Ananda, as at many other Bagan sites, have been whitewashed by “incompetent” conservators.

“Donors were too dedicated to renovating pagodas and they wanted to make [the entire pagoda] like new, regardless of whether there were mural paintings,” he said.

“We had a limited number of staff to guide the renovation project, so it ended up like this.”

‘There are many priceless murals in Bagan’s temples, but most are covered with lime because some incompetent conservators had no idea what the murals meant.’

Tampawaddy U Win Maung

Historian and archaeologist Tampawaddy U Win Maung said the whitewashing of art-covered pagodas and temple walls was common not only at Bagan but also sites dating to the Inwa, Pinya and Konbaung eras.

He said more restoration projects should be undertaken in collaboration with the board of trustees at each pagoda to reveal murals hidden by “incompetent” conservators.

“Removing the lime from the paintings can restore [some of their] authenticity but it is better not to [whitewash] them in the first place.”

Retired department director general U San Win said the former government’s restoration program was aimed at repairing pagodas damaged in a 1975 earthquake but the ministry did not have enough staff at the time to properly oversee the project.

“Donors were too dedicated to renovating the pagodas and they wanted to make [the entire pagoda] like new, regardless of whether there were mural paintings,” he said.

“Excesses had to be cut,” he said.

“Let there be restoration projects built in a way that allows for murals to be seen.”

Murals on the walls of Ananda Pagoda have been uncovered through a project to remove layers of lime applied following an earthquake in 1975. Photo: Myo Swe Than

A Buddha image looms over visitors inside Ananda Pagoda. Photo: Seng Mai

Cherry Thein

t.cherry6@gmail.com
### CLEAN & FRESH

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### HOME & KITCHEN

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Shackled press hinders Vietnam's progress

The state press is reduced to printing Sterilised news, which causes readers to turn to foreign publications, social media and blogs.

Workers prepare a flower display ahead of Independence Day celebrations in Hanoi in 2012. Photo: AFP

The state press is reduced to printing sterilised news, which causes readers to turn to foreign publications, social media and blogs.

The smidgen of real political, economic and military news that is officially released is fed only to the local media, which is entirely owned and controlled by the Communist Party.

Most reporters abjectly obeyed, and contributing to the development of the country and its people."

Furthermore, said the party's leadership, "The press should effectively meet the public's demand for information, while uniting society and contributing to the development of the country and its people."

Fine words, but sadly misplaced, because the ever-tightening shackles imposed by the Hanoi regime mean that neither of these meritorious goals can be realised.

That point was made in a recent article published in the foreign media by Nguyen Cong Khe, a former editor-in-chief of the best-selling daily newspaper Thanh Nien (Young Adults).

Urging "A free press in Vietnam", it was one of the boldest and most trenchant commentaries ever written by a Vietnamese journalist, who remains, at least for the moment, out of jail.

In the interest of full disclosure, let me say that I know Khe and met him several times when I ran a news bureau in Hanoi.

His name had originally been given to me by one of the party's younger and more open members, who rightly said that Khe was the bravest journalist in Vietnam.

In many ways, his recent article goes to the core of the same issues that the party's top brass sought to resolve at last week's conclaves, except of course that Khe made his conclusions public - and so in the more liberal Western media. That takes some guts.

He kicked off by stating the obvious: the Communist regime's dwindling popularity and its maladministration of the country's economy, can only be reversed if the media is allowed to operate freely.

Instead of taking this route, however, the party has gone the other way and increased the number of topics deemed sensitive, so that stories dealing with the behaviour of top leaders, land disputes and ties with China are severely circumcised, if not totally vetoed.

Consequently, the state press is reduced to printing sterilised news, which causes readers, especially younger ones, to turn to foreign publications, social media and blogs.

As well as students, some intellectuals and even former Viet Cong members now have their own well-known blogs where they chafe at the regime and draw thousands of hits each day.

Naturally, Hanoi throws up firewalls, but they are easily circumvented and the blogger's writings are widely disseminated, as occurred when it was discovered that last week's party meeting had held a vote to judge the performance of the top leaders of the Politburo.

No official information was given to the state media about the vote, but several internet sources soon revealed the result: strong disapproval and caused them to concede, in a rare public comment about last week's deliberations, that they must "make stronger efforts to stop political and moral degradation within the party."

Corruption and crony capitalism continue to be the prime bugbears, of course, and are to blame for Vietnam's huge public-sector debt, high rates of non-performing loans and inefficient state enterprises.

Image improvement has taken on new importance as Hanoi seeks allies around the world to help counter China's seemingly unstoppable attempt to control Vietnam's offshore territories.

But it cannot happen until the media is unshackled.

Having said that, Vietnamese reporters must accept some of the blame. Their situation is similar to that of their Indian colleagues in 1975 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency and imposed harsh media controls.

Most reporters openly obeyed, causing the state opposition leader Lak Advani to remark, "You were merely asked to bend, but you chose to crawl!"

Aside from Khe and a few other exceptions, journalists in Vietnam have made the same wretched choice.

Pham Van Thanh, public security minister Le Hong Anh, and party boss Nguyen Phong Trong.

The online condemnations, mostly related to alleged corruption and nepotism, were rumour-based, of course, but such is the public's lack of trust in the state media that the speculative blogs carry more credence, even if their language is often intemperate.

A recent item in one popular blog called The Work Report described PM Dung as “ignorant, greedy, sinful and cruel", while The Secret Palace asserted that "all the Communist Party leaders, without exception, are ignorant, greedy and despicable".

The content may be scurrilous and scurrilous, but - in a salutary lesson to our Indian colleagues in 1975 - it tends to be believed.

For, whenever the press is censored, people pass on news at home and in teashops, and what they whisper in private is invariably condemnation – and one day the private becomes public and regimes topple. It can take years, or decades, but it is inevitable.

In the meantime, it is no wonder that Trong approved a decision to veto publication of the result of the vote and authorised the continued, but ultimately futile, detention of bloggers and other dissenters.

Vietnam is the world's fifth-worst jailer of journalists – a record that is likely to remain until the day the regime and draws thousands of hits each day.

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What does Beijing want from Myanmar?

To understand Beijing’s objectives, we need to go back to 1962 when a military coup took place in Myanmar. The new regime, led by Ne Win, quickly had its sights set on expanding its influence in the border areas and establishing a foothold in northeastern Shan State.

In June 1967, anti-Chinese riots occurred in Myanmar, resulting in the death of numerous Chinese citizens and the attack on the Chinese embassy. In early 1968, a Chinese volunteer army began to attack the Shan State border areas in the guise of the Burmese Communist Party. Because of these attacks, the BCP was able to establish a foothold in northeastern Shan State.

Later, however, Ne Win tried to improve ties with China. After Deng Xiaoping took over in 1978, China stopped assisting the BCP, leading to its eventual collapse. In 1989, ethnic BCP soldiers, including Wa, Kokang and Kachin, staged a coup against the BCP leadership and formed their own groups. The leader who initiated the coup was Pheung Kya-shin.

The ethnic soldiers broke away from the BCP, formed their own groups, such as the United Wa State Army and MNDAA, and maintained their hold on former BCP territory and signed ceasefire agreements with the government.

By this time, the military dictators who seized power with a bloody crackdown in 1988 were enjoying good ties with Beijing. China completely supported them in the face of economic sanctions levied for appalling human rights abuses. In return, China was able to get its hands on much of Myanmar’s timber, jade, natural gas and other mineral resources. It also benefited from the opening of border trade, most of which was made up of Chinese exports.

While official relations with China were excellent, Myanmar people despised Beijing.

Shortly after President U Thein Sein came to power, he ordered the temporary suspension of the Myitsone Hydropower Project, which had been approved by the former military government. While natural gas and oil pipelines linking Rakhine State with Yunnan Province were completed, Myanmar people bitterly opposed the Letpadaung copper mine project.

But rather than encouraging ethnic armed groups to sign the ceasefire, China appears to be aiding an old warlord, Pheung Kya-shin. Some may see it as similar to China’s historical support for the BCP. It reinforces the perception within the government that Beijing only wants to gain advantage for China and its economic interests when dealing with Myanmar. It should be noted that the Myanmar government has lately been arresting Chinese timber smugglers in Kachin State.

More than 140 Chinese nationals were arrested, including 120 in a single day. This figure is larger than all of the foreigners arrested for illegal logging over the preceding four years.

We can’t know if the decision to publish an interview with Pheung Kya-shin in state media is related to the arrest of Chinese smugglers by the Tatmadaw. If the two cases are connected, we can say it’s a poor development for China-Myanmar relations.

But the fact is Beijing needs to help Myanmar build peace if it wants to implement its Two-Ocean Strategy, to bring economic benefits for both countries and to promote mutually friendly relations between people of both countries.

It shouldn’t carry fire in one hand and water in the other, and it’s time to review its policy toward extraction of Myanmar’s natural resources.

–  Translation by Thiri Min Htun
Experts cautious on stock market appeal

AYE THIDAR KYAW
ayethidarkyaw@gmail.com

THE planned stock market will likely not be a success straight out of the starting gate, though could eventually emerge as a worthwhile destination for investment, according to experts.

While the Yangon Stock Exchange is slated to open in October 2015, it will need to prove its performance before it can capture trust – and capital – from potential investors.

A host of challenges confront the exchange, and would-be investors will need assurance the market is fair and well-regulated before they will participate. There are also few public companies that will be able to meet the listing criteria, meaning few stocks to choose from, particularly in the early years.

Asia Green Development Bank executive director U Soe Thein, who is also former managing director of Myanmar Securities Exchange Centre, said the government’s performance setting up the exchange has been hasty so far, and it is unlikely to develop as quickly as some would wish.

Although the Securities Exchange Law was passed in July 2013, much of the legal structure that is to back the exchange hasn’t been released. U Soe Thein said that the market will have difficulty developing until processes and rules are clear.

Regulators in particular must ensure that listed companies are transparent and investors are educated and provided with relevant information, or they risk being cheated.

Shares in YSX-listed firms will need to compete with other capital investment, such as bonds, as well as high interest rates on deposits offered by local banks. “It might be the wrong message if someone says a share’s value always goes up, we cannot refer only to the

situation on the New York stock exchange,” he said.

Deputy finance minister U Maung Maung Thein said there are many potential investors who are not yet prepared to invest, and that the government must foster a “culture of saving money in deposit accounts.”

In order to attract money from deposit accounts into the stock market, it is important that international account standards are followed by reliable auditing firms. There also need to be choices of different companies – regional stock markets in Laos and Cambodia have had difficulty attracting interest from companies in participating, which has kept investors away.

So far Asia Green Development bank, First Myanmar Investment and Myanmar Agri-business have declared intention to list soon after the YSX’s launch. Other companies are considering listing, with some putting their books in order to meet regulatory and investor scrutiny, though have not yet made a commitment to list.

Myanmar Agri-business Public Company (MAPCO) managing director U Ye Min Aung said it has been preparing to list on the Yangon Stock Exchange since the Securities Exchange Law was passed in June 2013.

“Although MAPCO could work as a public company without a need to be listed, we [the Board of Directors] want to be a big, strong company that can compete on the international market – that’s why we’re trying to list,” he said. “But we know there are many challenges ahead.”

The Central Bank of Myanmar is currently working on a reliable settlement system for the Yangon Stock Exchange, which is being developed in conjunction with Japan International Cooperation Agency.

A central bank official said it is important Myanmar puts its potential capital to productive use. “The Central Bank should encourage development of the capital markets, rather than just converting things into gold, which becomes dead money,” he said.

Officials have sought to play up the market’s importance ahead of its launch. Deputy finance minister U Maung Maung Thein said stocks are an important alternative for those concerned about inflation.

“Inflation risk is terrifying for investors, but stock values rise as much as inflation rates,” he said at a seminar on the Yangon Stock Exchange on January 9. “Every business has its risks, but stocks have one of the least amounts of business risk.”

U Maung Maung Thein said other assets such as government bonds, US dollars and property are often at risk of inflation. He also pointed out that while prices for gold increased only 0.07pc last year on local markets, world stock markets provided a 10 to 12pc return.

Although government officials are keen to tout the potential of the stock market, experts said investors should ultimately choose assets with a profile that suits them.

Economist U Khine Htun said real estate may be more beneficial for many as long-term, particularly in the short term, as the stock market will take time.

Stock markets attempt to channel savings into capital that companies can use to expand, though are at the mercy of a company’s honesty and business success. Listed companies must be transparent in their figures, though only “a few companies are willing to disclose their profile, which will be a challenge in the short term,” he said.

“Stocks may be similar to gambling, but it’s also predictable – the more information, the less risk,” he said.

The Yangon Stock Exchange may also be, in part, a response to regulations in the domestic property market, as rumors abound about a possible bubble, while other alternatives like gold are quiet. – Additional reporting by Zaw Htike and Kayoze Phone Kayaw
**Deputy Minister lays out path to stock exchange**

UP to 10 companies ought to meet the requirements to be listed on the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX), when it opens in October – though these requirements have still not been released, according to deputy finance minister U Maung Maung Thein.

In agreements that have been signed to establish the exchange and much of the technical infrastructure is in place, one of the rules and regulations needed to license securities players and govern the exchange have yet to be finished.

Companies are not yet certain what the requirements will be to list on the YSX, as they have also not been released – though draft sets of requirements have been publicly discussed.

Myanmar and Brunei are now the last ASEAN members without a stock exchange, as several countries have opened them in recent years. Myanmar has an existing over-the-counter exchange that can trade shares in two companies, though it is not considered a modern stock market.

“If a democracy-country, we need a stock exchange,” said U Maung Maung Thein. “It is one of the characteristics of a market economy. In the world there are only nine countries that don’t have an exchange, including Myanmar. Six of these are small island countries, and the other two are on North Korea and Brunei,” he said.

Although industry insiders say it is likely there will be around four or five companies ready to list in October, U Maung Maung Thein told The Myanmar Times about 10 could be ready when the exchange launches.

Other regional exchanges have gotten off to slow starts. Cambodia’s exchange opened in 2013 with no listed companies, and currently has two, while Laos opened its exchange in 2011 with no listed companies.

U Maung Maung Thein said on the sidelines of a seminar last week that the challenges are different in each country. For instance Laos only has a handful of public companies to draw from for listings, while Myanmar currently has over 200 public companies.

“So when the [Securities Exchange Commission] announces the criteria to be listed on the exchange, [companies] will try to be eligible,” he said. “It will not be a problem even though we are starting with a few companies. In the future more will be eligible.”

U Maung Maung Thein said the Yangon Stock Exchange will start only with quality companies, as it is important to make the market safe for investors before expanding.

So far at least three local firms – First Myanmar Investment, Asia Green Development Bank and Myanmar Agri-business Public Company – have declared intention to list.

Several other public companies have also quietly begun preparing to list on the exchange, meaning some firms will require comparatively minor changes to meet the criteria – should they ultimately choose to do.

U Aung Thura, CEO of Thura Swiss, said internationally, listed companies must be transparent and have clear record-keeping systems, and local companies interested in the exchange must do the same.

U Maung Maung Thein said the listing criteria has yet to be announced, but would be coming soon.

“There will be enough time for the companies to prepare. And the criteria will comprise nine or 10 points – but I can’t reveal it now,” he said.

U Maung Maung Thein also said that the current over-the-counter trade in these public companies will eventually be banned.

“The Finance Ministry already plans to announce a notice issuing a ban. But by doing this, we mean to control it with proper regulations,” he said.

“Many people are buying companies’ shares without studying the prospects.”

Companies interested in applying to be underwriters, dealers, brokers and consultants may start applying from the third week of January, said U Maung Maung Thein.

Although officials are keen to see the market take off in October, there is lots to do to ensure it is a success.

**leads to informal deals**

50 to 100 steps in townships, so whether the shops are illegal or legal, it’s clear the policies are not yet effective,” said U Nay Myo Aung, who represents Seikkan township at Yangon Region parliament.

In addition to the restrictions on new permits, fees have also been increased. Although Yangon Region approved raising the annual fees paid by liquor shops in September 2014, the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is in charge of collecting the money, has so far continued charging previous rates.

However, businesspeople say it is likely the ministry will increase the fees soon to match Yangon Region’s rates, perhaps in the coming fiscal year.

Industry insiders say the government does not yet appear likely to retreat on its policies toward alcohol.

Evelyn Khin general manager U Zaw Zaw Aung said he understands fees will change in the next fiscal year, 2015-16, while there could be more restrictions on liquor companies involved in distilling and bottling beer.

U Nay Myo Aung said some township-level officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs’ General Administration Department are themselves getting involved in the secondary market for liquor licences.

“It is a challenge to suggest policies and participation in the industry, as I represent only Seikkan township and can’t complain on the problems of other townships,” he said.

Liquor licences in Yangon are fetching about K500,000 on the open market, only a little above the cost of K500,000 to transfer a licence through government offices, said U Sein Win, an agent of SS liquor distribution.

The relatively low costs in Yangon come as there have been many licences issued in the past, though prices could rise if supply of licences is constricted in the future, he said.

“The liquor business is narrowing due to higher tax and stricter government policy,” said U Sein Win.

A General Administration Department official in Dagon Seikkan township said policy exists to cut down on distilling. However, authorities do not prevent transferring licences, as they recognize there is no other way for businesses to obtain licences, he added.

**Multilevel marketing is popular, but it’s buyer-beware out there**
(Chinese stewed dumplings, cooked); sandwiches; shumai (Chinese steam dumplings, cooked); sashimi; takoyaki (fried balls of batter mix with small pieces of octopus); niku-manju (steamed buns with minced meat and hamburgers (prepared); pizzas (prepared); box lunches (prepared); hot dogs (prepared); meat pies (prepared); ravioli (prepared); yeast powder; koji (fermenting malted rice); yeast; baking powder; ferments for pasties; yeast in pill form, not for pharmaceutical use; food; confectionery mixes; confectionery mixes; mixes for making bakery goods; by-product of rice for food (sake lees); husked rice; husked oats; husked barley; flour for food; soy flour; starch for food; gluten for food" - Class: 30

Alcoholic beverage; fruit juice for food; plum wine; Japanese liquors (in general); shochu (Japanese white liquor); shochu-based mixed liquor (mirin); western liquors (in general); alcoholic beverages containing fruit; chuhai; cocktails; prepared vodka cocktails; prepared shochu cocktails; distilled beverages (of distillation spirit); nonalcoholic extracts; alcoholic; alcoholic beverages of fruit; Chinese liquors (in general); flavored tonic liquors; alcoholic extracts; alcoholic essences" Class: 33

(Reg: Nos. IV.7/4346/2008 & IV/10559/2013)
in respect of: “Chemicals, adhesives (not for stationery or household purposes); plant growth regulating preparations; cattle food and feed; cattle feed; hay; cattle fodder; cattle food; cattle concentrates; cattle foodstuff; cattle feed; Lochleven (Chinese stuffed dumplings, cooked); sandwiches; shumai (Chinese steam dumplings, cooked); sashimi; takoyaki (fried balls of batter mix with small pieces of octopus); niku-manju (steamed buns with minced meat and hamburgers (prepared); pizzas (prepared); box lunches (prepared); hot dogs (prepared); meat pies (prepared); ravioli (prepared); yeast powder; koji (fermenting malted rice); yeast; baking powder; ferments for pasties; yeast in pill form, not for pharmaceutical use; food; confectionery mixes; confectionery mixes; mixes for making bakery goods; by-product of rice for food (sake lees); husked rice; husked oats; husked barley; flour for food; soy flour; starch for food; gluten for food" - Class: 30

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(Reg: Nos. IV.7/3477/2008 & IV/10534/2013)
in respect of: “Alcoholic beverages (except beer) - Int’l Class: 33

(Reg: Nos. IV.7/3478/2008 & IV/10556/2013)
in respect of: “Eddie oils and fats; margarine; milk products; milk beverages, milk predominating; lactic acid drinks; lactic acid bacteria drinks; drinking yogurts; butter; cheese; curd; cream (daily products); yogurt; powdered milk (not for babies); condensed milk; meats for human consumption (fresh, chilled or frozen); eggs; fresh, chilled or frozen edible aquatic animals (not live); frozen vegetables; frozen fruits; processed meat products; charcuterie; meat extracts; processed fisheries products; gelatine for food; processed vegetables and fruits; tomato sauce for cooking; dried vegetables; vegetable juices for cooking; dried fruits; tomato puree; weed extracts for food; jams; peanut butter; marmalade; abura-age (fried tofu pieces); kohri-dofu (freeze-dried tofu pieces); konnyaku (jelly made from devils’ tongue root); soya milk (milk substitute); tofu; natto (fermented soybeans); white of eggs; yolk of eggs; powdered eggs; processed eggs; soups; preparations for making soups; bouillon; preparations for making bouillon; bouillon concentrates; broth; broth concentrates; vegetable soup preparations; curry; stew and soup mixes; otsukae-nori (dried flakes of laver for sprinkling on rice in hot water); fui-kake (seasoned powder for sprinkling on rice); side dish -made of fermented soybean (name-mono); raw pulses; protein for human consumption; albumen for food; casein for food; hydrolyzed protein used as a food additive or for food filler" - Class: 29

“Sausage binding materials; thickening agents for cooking foodstuffs; binding agents for ice-cream (edible ices); meat tenderizers, for household purposes; preparations for stiffening whipped cream; tea; tea-based beverages; iced tea; tea-bean based beverages with fruit flavoring; coffee; cocoa; coffee-based beverages; cocoa based beverages; cocoa products; chicory; coffee (coffee substitute); chocolate-based beverages; cocoa beverages with milk; coffee beverages with milk; chocolate beverages with milk; vegetarian preparations for use as coffee substitutes; artificial coffee; seasonings; condiments; chemical seasonings; seasonings containing meat extracts, fish extracts; wine-based seasoning sauce, sake-based seasoning sauce, hydrolyzed proteins for seasoning purposes; sauces; condiments; tomato sauce; meat gravies; ketchup (sauce); soya sauce; vinegar; dressings for salad; mayonnaise; sugar; maltose; honey; glucose for food; molasses for food; natural sweeteners; Worcester sauce; vinegar mixes; soya-tasu (seasonings soy sauce); white sauce; sauce for barbecued meat; cube stock; cube stock; marinades; marmalade; marmalade for food; glucose for food; powdered starch syrup for food; starch syrup for food; spices; flavorings, other than essential oils, for beverages; aromatic preparations for food; vanilla (flavoring); mint for convenience; essences for foodstuffs; essences and essential oils; ice; edible ices; confectionery, bread and buns; pastries; ice cream mixes; sherbet mixes; unroasted coffee; cereal preparations; farinaceous foods; almond paste; gyoza...
The new fuel surcharge will be good for airlines. The fuel price decline continues,” she said. “We fill up at the convenient airport.” Yangon Airways all said they have not yet cut ticket prices as jet fuel costs decline. Some foreign airlines servicing Myanmar say they have reduced prices. Vietnam Airlines will cut its fuel surcharge it adds to each ticket for its Yangon to Japan flights on February 1, said the firm’s sales and marketing executive Daw That Hnin Wai. “The new fuel surcharge will be US$194 for a round trip, from $256 currently,” she said.

No relief yet for air travellers

E BI THU
91.asachu@gmail.com

Planing jet fuel prices have not yet brought relief to domestic airfare, even as some international carriers have begun cutting ticket prices.

Officials from Myanmar Airways International, Asian Wings and Yangon Airways all said they have not yet cut ticket prices despite crude oil’s drop by over 50 percent last year, which has also led to a decline in jet fuel costs.

Myanmar Airways International is already offering promotional rates, so cannot immediately reduce ticket prices, said its marketing and public relations manager Daw Aye Mra Tha.

“We will reduce prices a little if the fuel price decline continues,” she said.

Daw Aye Mra Tha said that since the airline - unlike most firms in the market - competes on international routes, it must keep up with foreign firms.

Myanmar Airways International purchases its jet fuel from the different locations it services, including Singapore, Bangkok and Myanmar - where government-owned Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise holds a monopoly on jet fuel.

“We fill up at the convenient airport. Sometimes MEPEE is more reasonably priced than fuel at foreign airports,” she said. Daw Aye Mra Tha added that declining fuel prices will on the whole be good for airlines.

However, experts say domestic airlines have been reluctant to reduce ticket prices even though the cost of jet fuel is on the decline.

U Min Thein, joint secretary general of the Union of Myanmar Travel Association, said domestic airline tickets are expensive due to a shortage of aircraft in the country, while existing planes often have small capacities.

He added airlines should look at reducing ticket prices as jet fuel costs decline. “If hotel rooms and air tickets became cheaper, more tourists will come to Myanmar,” he said.

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continued from page 26

in respect of:- the goods in Class: 30 as shown above under Reg. No. IV/10556/2013, “Beer; low malt beer; non-alcoholic beverages; carbonated drinks (refreshing beverages); aerated water; mineral water; seltzer water; waters (beverages); fruit flavored water; non-alcoholic fruit juice beverages; soy-based beverages, not being milk substitutes; extracts of hops for making beer; whey beverages; vegetable juices (beverages); non-alcoholic fruit extracts; preparations for making beverages; preparations for making liqueurs; syrups for beverages; pastilles for effervescing beverages; powders for effervescing beverages” - Class: 32 the goods in Class: 33 as shown above under Reg. No. IV/10556/2013.

Any fraudulent imitation or unauthorized use of the said trademarks or other infringements whatsoever will be dealt with according to law.

U Kyi Win Associates for KIRIN KABUSHIKI KAISHA (also trading as KIRIN Company, Limited)
P.O. Box No. 26, Yangon.
Phone: 372416
Dated: 19th January, 2015

Petrol station problems lead to constant Thein Phyu queues

“Buy my petrol from the station because it’s of good quality,” said Ko Zin Myo, a Tarawte township taxi driver. “Other shops mix in water and that damages the car.”

While word has spread among taxi drivers and car owners that the station is honest and not mixing water into its fuel, representatives from Max Energy say the problem people encounter at different pumps is generally not related to honesty.

Max Energy executive director U Kyaw Zay Myint said in an interview that since the combination of water and fuel do not make a homogenous mixture, it is usually not true that stations are deliberately mixing the two. Rather than deliberately trying to bilk customers, poorly stored petrol can capture moisture and debris, which causes the problems for car engines.

“If station staff do not take care of storage, there will be moisture.”

U Kyaw Zay Myint Max Energy

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LOVE them or hate them, everyone has an opinion on the selfie stick. The devices allow people to take photos of themselves with their phones at more than arm’s length, improving the snapshot. Some mobile users are snapping them up, while others see them as an object of ridicule – though so far there haven’t been enough naysayers to stop the selfie stick boom.

Shop owners say the sticks are catching on in Myanmar just as they are in the rest of the world. Users, especially young people, enjoy taking photos of themselves with different backgrounds to share on social media. The selfie stick makes it easier to include more people in a group photo or get the picture-perfect background by extending the camera up to 60 centimetres further away from a selfie-taking subject than would otherwise be possible. Although the photos might be better as a result, users must battle through the perception that they look a little ridiculous.

“I like my selfie stick because it lets me take photos without help. If I’m travelling alone, this stick helps make memories and is my good partner,” said Ma Cho Lae Yee, 18. Other users like them because they cut out the photographer – often a friend with poor photography skills – and allow them to take the photo themselves.

A selfie stick – generally made in China and imported to Myanmar – costs about K10,000 at local shops, though different models range between K8000 and K20,000. Ko Htun, owner of one Yangon mobile shop, said there is more business in selfie sticks compared to other phone accessories like cases and headsets.

“This month, selfie stick sales have been brisk,” he said. “Youth are buying and selling them faster than you think.”

It is not only Yangon that saw a sudden spike in sales of selfie sticks recently. Ko Zarni, owner of Tar Tar Mobile shop and also a distributor of products outside Yangon, said they have been catching on in other places.

Ko Zarni said he sells about 30 sticks a week, with the majority of buyers being young men and women between 18 and 25.

Not everyone is so keen on the new devices, however. Daw San San Htwe, 35, said it’s a young person’s tool. She added it is a little embarrassing to even watch them in action.

“Sometimes I see young girls taking 7 or 10 photos so much that it makes me go cross-eyed.”

Others are keen on selfies, but haven’t yet come to terms with the addition of a stick. Ma Nay Chi, 20, said she often sneaks a selfie when no one is watching, but is too shy to wield a stick in the public’s view, unless joined by friends.

Still, a stroll around Myanmar’s scenic places or gatherings of friends is likely to reveal a selfie stick. Mobile shop sellers hope the trend is here to stay, and that other mobile users can overcome their fear of embarrassment when using a selfie stick in favour of taking that perfect picture destined for social media.
LAST CHANCE TO ENTER

RECOGNISING THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY’S REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY, THE INAUGURAL MYANMAR PROPERTY AWARDS WILL BECOME THE BENCHMARK FOR EXCELLENCE AND PUT THE NATION’S DEVELOPERS IN THE REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT.

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Best Resort Development
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Best Green Development

DESIGN
Best Residential Architectural Design
Best Residential Interior Design
Best Retail Architectural Design
Best Office Architectural Design
Best Hotel Architectural Design
Best Landscape Architectural Design
Best Hotel Interior Design
Best Commercial Development (Myanmar)
Best Residential Development (Myanmar)
Caution urged before joining multilevel marketing firms

While some multilevel marketing companies offer legitimate ways for people to get involved in business, others stray dangerously close to pyramid schemes – and in Myanmar it’s usually buyer beware.

**Budget shortfall to exceed forecast**

AUNG SHIN
koshumgtha@gmail.com

THE government will rake in less revenue for the current fiscal year than it initially expected, members of the Financial Commission said in Nay Pyi Taw on January 14.

This year’s shortfall has been a central goal of officials since the new government took office in the 2013-14 fiscal year, when it generated revenues of about K$6 trillion (US$5.8 billion).

This year, government accounts are likely to underwhelm particularly due to declining receipts from natural resources.

“The amount of revenue is not as we expected,” this year’s decrease in revenue from natural gas declined due to fluctuations in international oil, the telecom operators have finished paying their license fee, electricity subsidisation continues even though power generation is expensive, and the trade deficit,” said President U Thein Sein during the meeting, according to state media.

About K$16.9 trillion (US$16.4 billion) will be collected this fiscal year, a slight improvement on last year’s K$14.2 trillion but not as much as previously hoped.

The January 14 meeting by the government’s Financial Commission discussed the coming year’s budget, aiming to put forward a report to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in the coming session.

The shortfall arrives as the government faces difficulties increasing the education and salaries for government employees, government faces difficulties increasing the education and salaries for government employees, the president said.

Health budgets and investing in infrastructure, the president said.

Increase state revenue has been a standing goal of the government for over three years, but it hasn’t reached its intended level.

“Pyramid schemes are illegal [in Myanmar],” Mr Rose said. “Is it just [another] way to flip product.”

While Myanmar has passed a consumer protection bill, there is much more to be done to protect everyday consumers.

“One has to be very careful understanding what these organisations are and what they are not,” he said.

Anecdotal evidence indicates there are a range of multilevel network marketing firms operating in Myanmar. Besides Unicity, representatives of up to 10 companies like Aim Star Network and Jeunesse Global have been advertising in the country.

“Unicity’s philosophy is ‘to literally do his or her own due diligence.’”

Eric Rose
Lawyer

EARNING a modest monthly wage of US$250 has left Ma Poe Poe searching for opportunities to supplement her income from different work.

She had been looking into other sideline jobs, but the offer that came from a multilevel marketing company seemed a perfect fit.

Alarming her about $1000 in products at a firm, she became a member of the company’s sales force and began selling in her free time.

“I believed my life would get better in a short time by investing in multilevel marketing, so I made that investment,” said Ma Poe Poe.

She is one of thousands across Myanmar who have joined multilevel marketing firms.

Yet the business model is both successful and controversial – not just here, but around the world.

Multilevel marketing operates by having individuals sell products, often through direct sales. Typically, distributors earn commissions not only for their sales but also sales made by the people they recruit, according to the United States’ Federal Trade Commission.

Yet not all multilevel marketing firms are legitimate businesses.

“If the money you make is based on your sales to the public, it may be a legitimate multilevel marketing plan. If the money you make is based on the number of people you recruit and your sales to them, it’s not. It’s a pyramid scheme,” the commission’s website says.

Pyramid schemes are illegal [in the United States], and the vast majority of participants lose money.

Despite these warnings, Ma Poe Poe has joined Unicity, one of many multilevel firms that have set up in Myanmar in recent years.

Her current income from Unicity reaches up to $300 a month. This comes from her sales, but also depends on how many people in her downline – people she has recruited – have sold products.

Ma Poe Poe hopes that this will steadily increase to the one point where she can quit her current job and move to marketing full-time, although she is reluctant to make the jump yet.

Unicity’s international grew out of two merged American nutrition companies that have a combined operating history of 250 years, Myanmar representatives said in an email to The Myanmar Times.

It officially opened in Myanmar on December 13, 2014, though representatives have previously been in the country.

‘A Myanmar young entrepreneur has to literally do his or her own due diligence.’

Eric Rose
Lawyer

It manufactures and sells a range of nutritional products, and relies on word of mouth and individual entrepreneurs rather than mass-market advertising and a big retail model, it said.

The firm insists it follows all consumer protection act, there is much more to be done to protect everyday consumers.

“One has to be very careful understanding what these organisations are and what they are not,” he said.

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Casinos double down for 2015

Melco Crown Entertainment, headed by Mr Ho and his Australian billionaire partner James Packer, on January 12 said it plans to woo vacationing Chinese with a family entertainment centre it will open with Time Warner at its new US$3.2 billion Macau casino. This is part of the company’s plan to shift resources away from high rollers, Mr Ho said.

Casino operators including Melco, Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd and Sands China Ltd are targeting mass market gamblers from China as the city diversifies its economy that largely relies on casino gambling for government revenue. Macau suffered the worst year in 2016 as Chinese President Xi Jinping’s anti-graft drive turned away high-end players who contributed to a majority of the city’s gambling takings.

“If you look at how many more billionaires are going to drop out of trees in the next 10 years?” said Mr Ho, Melco’s chief executive officer and co-chair. “It is going to be a major market.”

Mr Ho, the son of 93-year-old casino gambling mogul Stanley Ho, expects the casino industry to recover in the second half of the year and end 2015 with growth in the “low-to-mid-single digits,” boosted by Melco’s Studio City and other openings this year, he said. Galaxy will open the second phase of its Cotai project in the middle of this year.

Deutsche Bank and Credit Suisse Group estimated Macau casino revenue in 2015 to fall 8pc and 6pc respectively. Macau’s government has been curbing money flows to the territory over concern that illegal funds are being taken out of the mainland. It’s restricting the use of China UnionPay Co’s debit cards at casinos and tightening rules on junket operators, the middlemen that provide credit and arrange trips for Chinese high rollers.

“Mr Ho said he hasn’t seen any further restrictions and that China’s anti-corruption campaign “is directed at government officials” which is affecting consumption appetite of people from the mainland. “It’s a good time to stay low profile,” he said.

“Once people figure out what the new normal is, then ultimately the population base and the consumption power is so great that it’s all going to come back,” Mr Ho said. “The problem is nobody knows what is the new normal right now.”

The company hopes Macau will allow it to put more gambling tables with such non-gambling elements at the new resort in line with government guidelines, he said.

Chinese president Xi had called on Macau, the only Chinese city that legally allows casino gambling, to nurture new growth areas and turn the city into a world tourism and leisure centre. – Bloomberg
Passing the buck on fuel price

WHAT should the fuel price be? Drivers have heard tales of oil’s tumble on international markets, falling by 50 percent a barrel last year. Yet prices at the domestic pumps have not fallen nearly as far, losing about a quarter of their value in 2014, eluding tea-shop talk about whether drivers are getting a fair deal. Industry insiders say there are a range of factors that influence local petrol prices. While crude prices are a key component, demand from all the new cars, investment dollars and logistical concerns are also of prime importance.

Myanmar importers generally buy fuel with short-term contracts due to a lack of storage space. This means importers are more exposed to international costs.

Brent, a benchmark crude, dropped to US$48 a barrel early last week, a 5-and-a-half year low. It had previously spent much of 2014 above $100 a barrel on international markets.

There has been talk by commentators that this drop ought to drive fuel-importing economies, such as Asian countries. For drivers, however, they are most concerned with when the prices are coming down.

Low-grade fuel costs K280 a litre less now than it did six months ago, selling in Yangon last week at around K730 a litre.

U Kyaw Zay Myint, executive director of Max Energy, said the domestic market is based not only on the international price of crude, but a range of other factors.

“Our petrol is imported from foreign countries. We have to think about these charges. That's why the price is falling not as much as it is worldwide, even though it has declined somewhat,” he said.

With minimal refining capacity in the country, finished petroleum products must be imported from places such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

About 271.621 million gallons of petrol and 293.644 million gallons of diesel were imported from January 1, 2014 to January 5, 2014, according to Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise.

“It's hard to say what the price at the pumps should be,” said U Kyaw Zaw, a director at Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise, a state-owned firm.

While previously the government controlled the industry, it privatized state-owned petrol stations and began allowing the imports and distribution of most petroleum products in 2010.

Myanma Petroleum Products Enterprise currently handles only government’s supply, with the price for most consumers out of its hands.

“We can’t fix the fuel prices at private stations. It’s private business. They can import and sell fuel at whatever prices they like.”

“It can be said the public’s fuel price is not lowered to the most suitable price at present,” he said.

The state firm still imports petroleum products to supply the government's needs, which requires imports of nearly four million gallons annual. It then sells surplus to the private sector, though not a large amount.

The Myanmar Petroleum Trade Association is the industry body that regulated licenses to import and distribute fuel. The association is chaired by businessman U Tay Za, and counts other prominent entrepreneurs on its central executive committee. It currently has about 90 members allowed to import and distribute petroleum products.

Association secretary U Win Myint said the association itself does not control prices, but rather the individual companies themselves which determine prices.

“Anyone can take part in this business after applying for an import licence,” he said. “Our association aims to deliver advantages for the country and its entrepreneurs.”

“We are going to announce a tender for joint venture partnerships with foreign companies, and they can look at our existing facilities,” said an MPPE official. “It will happen soon.”

MPPE is one of the largest downstream players in the country. Parts of it have been privatized, such as its state-owned petrol stations which were sold in 2010, while its monopoly on fuel imports has been broken, with foreign companies allowed to enter the business.

The firm once has over 260 stations, but was left with only 12 after the 2010 privatizations. Since then, about 70 private companies have been licensed to import and distribute petrol products.

Currently, MPPE is handling the government’s supply of petroleum products as well as selling surplus products to private companies.

“We will be able to extend our business facilities with the joint venture with a foreign firm,” the official said. MPPE also recently announced Singapore’s Puma Energy was the winner of a tender to join it in the jet fuel business. – Aung Shin

MPPE in more joint ventures

INTERNATIONAL companies will be invited to joint-state owned Myan-
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**Job Watch**

**Path**

Path, an international nonprofit organization, currently seeks qualified candidates for the Program Advisor position (01) in our Yangon office.

The Path program in the Mekong is currently implementing a broad portfolio of activities on a range of health issues. This includes work on vaccine and immunization, nutrition, reproductive, maternal and child health, and infectious diseases. Path is seeking to locally recruit:

- A dynamic Program Advisor (Job Code: 166642) to provide communications support to projects teams in Myanmar and Vietnam. The Program Advisor will also assist the Mekong Regional Program Director and other staff with program development activities.

For full job descriptions and information on the application process, please visit the jobs section of the PATH website (www.path.org).

Deadline for on-line application submission: January 21st, 2015.

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**United Nations Development Programme**

**Vacancy Announcement – 00/UNDP HR/2013**

**Title:** Programme Analyst (DRR)  
**Grade:** NO-B  
**Duty Station:** Yangon

**Responsible:** Ensures effective integration of Disaster Risk Reduction component in support to Country Programme. Supervises and monitors implementation of the CO Disaster Risk Reduction component and related projects. Ensures coordination with other units and stakeholders. Ensures quality management services and facilitates Knowledge Building and Management

**Qualifications and experience:** Master degree in DRR, Environment and Climate Change related field of expertise, including engineering, public administration, social development and natural resources management and related fields, with at least 2 years of experience in the sector, including rural/community development initiatives. In addition, the incumbent should have excellent command of MS office suite applications (Word, Excel, Access, Power Point) and have experiences on networking and strengthening capacity of CBOs/CSOs and proven ability to lead a team and to plan and organize work productively with the team.

**Duty Station:** Yangon

**Deadline:** 23 January 2015

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**UNFPA**

UNFPA – because everyone counts. The United Nations Population Fund: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.

Interested in being part of a multi-cultural team delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person’s potential is fulfilled in Myanmar? Come and join us, because at UNFPA, everyone counts. We are seeking a creative, dynamic and highly motivated individual to join our growing effort to drive forward to the next level of UNFPA country programme on population, gender equality and reproductive health and rights for the people in Myanmar.

If you’re looking for an opportunity to make a difference, thrive in a challenging yet rewarding teamwork environment, we wish to hear from you.

**Position:** Programme Analyst, Gender

**Type of Contract:** Fixed Term

**Grade:** NO-B

**Duty Station:** Yangon

**Deadline:** 05 February 2015

Applications should be addressed to UNFPA Representative. Attention: International Operations Manager, Room A-07, UNFPA, No.6, Natmauk Road, Yangon.

Email: myanmar.office@unfpa.org

For further details, please see the vacancy announcement posted at UN billboard. No.6, Natmauk Road, Yangon and also at UNFPA website (http://myanmar.unfpa.org)

Applications will be considered only when meeting all requirements set in detailed vacancy announcement.
**HONG KONG**

Li Ka-Shing losing status as bellwether, says state media

A CHINESE newspaper close to the ruling Communist Party on January 14 said Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-Shing’s days as a “bellwether” for China’s economy were probably over, downgrading a major corporate milestone.

Billionaire Mr Li, 86, announced a sweeping re-arrangement of his vast business empire in January.

Hong Kong developer Cheung Kong Holdings, his flagship firm, will take over its separately quoted subsidiary Hutchison Whampoa and the combined entity will be split into two, creating a focused property firm and an international conglomerate, including interests in telecoms, utilities and ports.

Investors cheered the deal, sending both firms’ shares jumping on January 12, but China’s Global Times tabloid said Mr Li has previously sold some real estate assets on the mainland and “increased his holdings in Europe”.

It cited “rumours” the corporate revamp signals he is about to re-arrange assets from China and Hong Kong in a huge bet against yuan-denominated assets – and insisted such a move would mean little given the size of the Chinese economy and the rise of a new class of entrepreneurs, such as the founder of Internet giant Alibaba.

“Li has created miracles for his generation, but the younger generation of Jack Ma may be more capable of catching up with the changes happening in China and possess the ability to make adventurous interactions,” the paper said in an editorial.

“Li’s investment is a drop in the ocean compared to the huge size of the Chinese economy,” it added. “There have been numerous pessimistic predictions about China, but they all proved to deviate from reality.”

**MANDALAY**

Tada-U developers start on hotel zone

Large-scale project attempts to overcome difficulties raising funds and acquiring land

‘We agreed to take the compensation money and we welcome the project … Actually our land is not good for agriculture.’

U Hla Thein

Local villager

Tourism Development has now acquired the rights to 2,890 acres from villagers in return for compensation, though had initially targeted acquiring 5,422 acres when it announced the project in 2012.

The first step of the large development is a Hotel Zone, which will be built over the next two years. U Yan Win said up to 20 high-quality hotels could eventually be located at the site.

The development is located south of Mandalay near tourist sites, such as the historical cities of Inwa, Sagaing and Amarapura. The project hopes to take on a local feet, in part by developing only 65 percent of the total area, with the rest left fallow.

Development was slated to cost around US$600 million in total when it was announced in 2012. As a public company, it has been selling shares, and has so far raised about K50 billion ($48.5 million).

**Location of the Week**

Location key to Kan Street home

Transportation is so important for happy Yangon living. Seeking to reduce time spent in a traffic jam is a major concern for nearly everyone, and unless you’re nocturnal or own a blimp, that boils down to location.

Papy Road is a major north-south thoroughfare, and this week’s house is on Kan Street, which connects Papy with Inlay Road, right near Inlay Lake.

Although it’s almost never easy to commute during the day, a Kan Street location is a strong choice for getting where you want to be.

The house is two-and-a-half stories, not overly large for a home but big enough for a family of five people. There’s also some room in the compound to be used for a garden or a playground, and a garage for a vehicle.

The house seems a bit worn from the exterior, but inside it is grandly decorated. The rooms are newly constructed and well-decorated – and also come fully furnished. The large parquet flooring is a particular draw.

The compound is 4,200 square feet, while the home’s interior has not shortage of space. There are four large bedrooms, two small bedrooms, five bathrooms and a kitchen. The owners are asking US$8,000 a month to rent. It’s a lot, but you’re also paying for a great location, and will be a good match for employees of large firms and the more successful variety of entrepreneur.

— Myat Nyein Aye
Tada-U developers start on hotel zone

Work has begun at the Tada-U site in Mandalay Region. Its developers have big dreams, though they’re starting with a hotel zone first.

“The price isn’t falling as people expected because there is economic pressure,” U Win Myint, Myanmar Petroleum Trade Association

Mandalay hotel zone chair U Win Myint said the faster the firm is able to acquire land, the quicker the project can be developed.

“We give K10 million in compensation for 1 acre,” he said. If farmers hand over 3 acres, they will get 2400 square feet of space in the project area.”

The company had initially offered K5 or K7 million an acre, but has upped its offering to attract more villagers to sell their land.

“The [petrol] price isn’t falling as people expected because there is economic pressure,” said K10 million, as it is very good for high-yield land.

MIAKI millionaire Jorge Perez says an end to a US economic embargo on Cuba could help turn Havana into a mecca for real estate investment.

“We should’ve opened our eyes a long time ago,” the 65-year-old said. “We need to take more time because this is a sensitive step. We want to make sure we are on pace, and don’t want to make nonsense of them.”

The US Agriculture Coalition for Cuba, with more than 25 companies and farm trade associations, was created January 15 in Washington to urge repeal of a 1996 law that placed permanent sanctions on Cuba after Fidel Castro seized power in a revolution.

In an interview at his Miami office, Mr Perez said he favours a lifting of the embargo even after Cuban exile groups organised protests in Miami’s Little Havana neighbourhood last month to oppose US President Barack Obama’s easing of restrictions in place for more than 50 years.

“We’ve opened our eyes a long time ago,” the 65-year-old said. “Opening up trade and the exchange of ideas would further the democratisation of Cuba. Demand for second homes will be much bigger than the Bahamans, Puerto Rico or Dominican Republic.”

A final decision will be made by the SEZ’s central committee, which is chaired by deputy railways minister Aung Ba Shwe, who is also chair of the SEZ’s Observation Group.

“We need to take more time because this is a sensitive step.”

U Aung Kyaw Than

Bid Committee

Winner postponed for Kyaukphyu

Cuba could emerge as the next hot property deal, says billionaire

SAO PAULO

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MPT picks up speed in telecoms race

STATE-OWNED telco Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications lost its monopoly on the telecoms market last year, joining a three-horse race with international entrants Ooredoo and Telenor. As the incumbent, MPT was first out of the starting gate. After signing a partnership with Japan’s KDDI Corporation and Sumitomo Corporation, it has quickly moved to modernise its operations and launch new tariff deals. Its latest mobile plan, Swe Thahar, cuts voice and SMS prices and changes the way MPT charges customers for internet usage, from by-the-minute to by-the-megabyte.

How many subscribers does MPT have now?

We have nearly 11 million currently active SIM customers. After the joint operation, 5 million SIM cards were distributed to the market. We don’t know how many SIM cards we sold before the joint operation. Among the 5 million SIM cards, we distributed, average activation rate would be 90 per cent. If people don’t use them for a while, [SIM cards] expire. So now including those who already lost their right to use [SIMs], we have 11 million activated users.

Why has MPT decided not to match competitors’ prices under its new Swe Thahar plan?

Not only in Myanmar, but in other countries telecom markets were opened and new operators challenged incumbent carriers with lower prices because their network coverage and more wasn’t big enough in comparison to the incumbent’s.

We don’t think we can charge more than others because we’re incumbent. We think we have to provide our service at affordable prices. MPT is still a part of the government, and has a big responsibility to Myanmar. In Laos, Cambodia, and India, telecom operators started price wars early on. Then they can’t keep investing in their network. A large army still remains with the failure of the liberalisation of the market itself. If that kind of situation happens, the customer suffers the most. MPT thinks that in Myanmar, the nationwide network has not been completed yet. Our first priority should be to establish a nationwide network and next, to provide services at affordable prices. We would like to contribute to Myanmar customers by providing better services, or new services. We should not be satisfied with higher prices than competitors, but we need to keep improving and providing better customer experiences. If we go now into a “price war”, we are worried that we cannot invest in area expansion and other necessary services.

Can you explain MPT’s new internet tariff on Swe Thahar?

In many countries the technology has advanced and we need to charge by volume. It’s an international standard. Also, with time-based charges, we can ensure fair charges if the speed is really slow. Once the speed becomes very fast, we cannot ensure fair charges if we charge by time. Some people might watch videos and occupy a large portion of the line.

[The new tariff] compared to the previous tariff with the slow speed, is really similar, or depends on the situation.

How fast is the internet with Swe Thahar?

The maximum theoretical speed [when the network is used by only one person] will be 21Mbps for the moment. Very soon we will introduce 42Mbps. As of now you can enjoy 2-3Mbps in required, and more than 5Mbps in Yangon suburban areas like Mayangone.

What distinguishes MPT from its competitors?

Technically, like regarding [the 3G technology] HSPA+, there are not big differences between ourselves and Ooredoo and Telenor. The radio frequency and the area covered is also limited. Then what will be the differences made by the carrier’s effort? Area coverage and quality of services.

We have been improving by designing the best placement of base stations, adjusting the angle of antennas, etc. We will continue making efforts for better network experiences.

One area where there may be a difference is land use. Does MPT have privileged access to government-owned land?

Not only competitors but we, MPT, are also struggling to build new towers. We are not getting special benefits from government for building new towers. As long as the land is used by MPT right now, we can use it. But other land, they may charge a little much, maybe. [laughs]

In the future, what percentage of MPT’s towers will be shared?

Quality should be the biggest problem for the tower-sharing. We have made many, many big improvements for many, many towers. So in the future, we may share almost all the towers [if required] from other places, but right now we are not getting special benefits from government for building new towers. As long as the land is used by MPT right now, we can use it. But other land, they may charge a little much, maybe. [laughs]

How will MPT address CDMA problems?

We have been improving by de-... maybe four years or something. Then what will be the difference between ourselves and Ooredoo and Telenor. The radio frequency and the area covered is also limited. Then what will be the differences made by the carrier’s effort? Area coverage and quality of services.

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How will MPT address CDMA phones?

As far as MPT is concerned, we have noticed that we cannot have CDMA phones just because we haven’t prepared for it right now. We will announce separately how to deal with CDMA. But one thing that we want to say is that we don’t plan to terminate CDMA.

MPT has been paying income taxes and a contribution to the government, but is it collecting the 5 per cent tax on telecoms?

No. We are waiting for some instructions to be issued by the government. If the government orders us to collect a tax from our end users, we may need to do so. But right now, no.

Have there been freezes on 2G B-hybrid installations?

It takes a very long time to complete the installation. But right now, we haven’t stopped system installation. [Last year] it was very slow, so it takes a very long time to complete that job. But right now, we’re gradually improving. We are thinking to do some fibre services to consumers also, but some years or some [time] later.

[We are] not signing up [new customers] yet, we have tons of back-orders. So that should be the problem.

WILL MPT launch more branded shops, as it currently has one?

We have opened Myanmar into 17 regions, and each region will open two branded shops.

In the future, will MPT provide LTE services?

We will provide for LTE. However, the licence for LTE will be issued much later. We may need to wait maybe from two to three years to get the right to apply. Still we will prepare for the situation... maybe five years or something.

TRADE MARK CAUTION

United Parcel Service of America, Inc., a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Delaware, of 55 Glennlake Parkway, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30328, U.S.A., is the Owner of the following Trade Marks:-

UPS EXPRESS SAVER

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in respect of “Class 9: Computer hardware and software for use in preparing and printing shipping documents and invoices and tracking shipped packages and freight, and for logistics planning and supply chain management solutions, computer programs.

Class 35: Computerized tracking and tracing of packages and freight in transit, namely, providing computerized information on domestic and international transportation and delivery services; advertising services; business management services; business consultancy services; business administration services; office functions services; distribution of samples; office management and support.

Class 39: Transportation of letters, documents, communications, printed matter, and other goods and property by diverse means of transportation, and including related services namely warehousing and storage and packing and delivery.”

Fraudulent imitation or unauthorised use of the said Trade Mark will be dealt with according to law.

Win Myi Tin, M.A., H.G.P., D.B.L.

for United Parcel Service of America, Inc.

P. O. Box 60, Yangon

E-mail: makinhkayi.law@ups Mail.net.mm

Dated: 19 January 2015
Ooredoo rolls out to Mon State

AUNG KYAN NYUNT
aungkyanynunt28@gmail.com

OOREDOO Myanmar has extended their 3G network to more of Myanmar, including townships in Mon State.

The Qatar-based telco expanded 3G service to six townships in Mon State: Pound, Mudon, Belin, Mawlamyine, Kyauk Hto, and Thaton. It will roll out to another four townships in the area soon, the company said.

The firm also plans to start covering Kyaiktiyo Pagoda this year.

Mon State chief minister U Ohn Myint said in a statement that he welcomed the telco to the area.

"If there is better telecommunication systems there will be better business and social status," he said.

Ooredoo, like its fellow foreign competitor Telenor, has made all total coverage of Myanmar its aim.

"If we expand our network quickly, I think that Ooredoo Myanmar will deliver communication services to 97 percent of the population in five years," said Daw Thiri Kyar Nyo, Ooredoo Myanmar senior PR manager.

The firm also announced last week it would introduce its mobile money service “very soon”.

Fighting hate speech with tech

CATHERINE TAUWITWEIN

CIVIL society organisations, technologists and others came together last week in Yangon to find ways to answer hate speech and dangerous speech with technology.

Though the old saying goes that sticks and stones break bones and words can’t hurt, there’s no question one can lead to the other. To help counter the problem, newly minted innovation lab PeaceTech Myanmar, Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) hosted a PeaceTech Exchange in Yangon’s community and tech hub, SuleTech.

Connectivity has helped enable both freedom of expression and the spread of hate speech and dangerous speech, which spurs concerns about what happens when millions more get connected in Myanmar.

"If 10 percent [connectivity] is already driving [speech issues], what will 50 per cent driver?" said Noel Dickover, senior program officer at the PeaceTech Lab at USIP.

While some might propagate problematic speech without ill intent – by sharing information online without weighing its veracity – others have dedicated themselves to its spread. "We have some groups that are intentionally spreading hate speech and trying to start violence. They have technology, funding, the big bucket," said MDDO executive director Ko Nay Phone Latt.

"On the other side we have some of evil society working for peace and against hate speech, but our weakness is that… they don’t know how to use the technology for their needs or have the funding," he continued.

The three-day PeaceTech Exchange, which saw international and local technologists connected with more than 70 civil society organisations, sought to remedy these two problems through networking, technical training, group sessions and finally, a workshop on applying for grants. At the event, CSOs boiled down challenges for technologists, resulting in particular "problem statements" that dealt with issues like the dissemination of bad information and spreading peaceful stories across Myanmar.

Next came strategies for tackling on issues with technology.

"One recurring theme is that there are many examples of communities working together in peace and harmony, and many civil society groups feel those stories aren't being very well told if, at all," said PeaceTech Myanmar executive director Ko Nay Phone Latt.

The event centres on teaching people how to use tech tools to promote a healthier information ecosystem, Mr Madden said, adding participants had been learning about practices such as fact-checking and photo verification.

MDDO programme manager Htaike Htaike Aung highlighted three elements – monitoring, reporting and rapid response – some CSOs included in projects combating dangerous speech.

The measures could involve actions like watching over media and event mapping. "For rapid response, some are thinking of having this mechanism where people can respond to rumours and speeches or false news that could incite violence," she said.

Ma Htaike Htaike Aung said mainstream media access and high levels of connectivity help fortify urban areas against speech-related incidents, though violence did break out in Mandalay. But "the pattern is always around rural areas where it's hard for people to get rapid response in terms of dangerous speeches or rumours," she said.

The digital divide between Myanmar's urban and rural communities can make it hard to use technology in the battle against hate speech. Ma Htaike Htaike Aung said a Karenn State CSO couldn't oppose offline sermons by monks and doctored photos from the web spread via CDs, pamphlets and posters with online solutions. "In terms of the internet to kind of counter that message, it's impossible," she said.

Ko Nay Phone Latt said answers to issues need to consider both online and offline approaches. PeaceTech program manager Ko Yin Naung Oo said a range of technologists at the event had particular advice for the majority of attendees hailing from outside Yangon. Tech touched on spanning SMS and radio to data visualisation. "There’s a whole spectrum," he said.

CSOs had the chance on the event's last day to learn how to put plans to paper for grant proposals. USIP has US $100,000 to $200,000 available to fund organisations whose high-calibre, speech-oriented proposals receive approval from its board.

"The hope is we get projects in place with funding such that there’s almost this counter approach in monitoring that goes with the trend line moving upwards," Mr Dickover said.

At the PeaceTech Exchange, a large, diverse crowd that counted youths, monks, techies and more worked together in a downtown tower overlooking one of the city’s most diverse corners, with City Hall, Sule Pagoda, a Baptist church, a mosque and Independence Monument II storeys below.

"We got independence because of everybody fighting for independence," Ko Nay Phone Latt said.
End ‘scandalous’ inequality, says Pope as he visits Philippines

POPE Francis has demanded leaders in the graft-plagued Philippines end “scandalous social inequalities” as he called on them to show integrity and reject corruption.

He made the comments on January 16 in his first major speech of a five-day visit to the Catholic Church’s Asian stronghold, where tens of millions live in deep poverty, after arriving to a rapturous reception the day before.

“The great biblical tradition enjoins on all peoples the duty to hear the voice of the poor. It bids us break the bonds of injustice and oppression which give rise to glaring, and indeed scandalous, social inequalities,” the pope said in the speech at the presidential palace.

Francis said that the Philippines, “together with many other countries in Asia”, faces the challenge of building a modern society that respects “our God-given human dignity and rights.”

To help the poor in the Philippines, Francis demanded that leaders and all other members of society fight corruption.

“It is now, more than ever, necessary that political leaders be outstanding for honesty, integrity and commitment to the common good,” he said.

He challenged “everyone, at all levels of society, to reject every form of corruption, which diverts resources from the poor.”

He said reforming social structures to end poverty required a “conversion of mind and heart”.

Francis had moments earlier met President Benigno Aquino, who has waged a high-profile campaign against corruption that has seen his predecessor and three senators detained.

Aquino also orchestrated the impeachment of the Supreme Court’s chief justice on corruption charges, and he has won international plaudits for his efforts.

But critics of Aquino, the son of democracy heroine Corazon Aquino, have accused him of focusing his anti-graft campaign only on opponents and not allies.

And, despite some of Asia’s strongest economic growth, Aquino’s more than four years in office have failed to make a major dent on poverty.

About 25 million Filipinos, or one-quarter of the population, live on the equivalent of 60 cents a day or less, according to the latest official poverty surveys.

The poverty has forced about 10 million Filipinos to head overseas in search of a better life.

Francis said one of the main purposes of his trip was to visit survivors of Super Typhoon Haiyan, known in the Philippines as Yolanda, which left 7350 people dead or missing in 2013.

The pope was due to spend January 17 in areas of the central Philippines that were devastated by the typhoon, which smashed into coastal communities with the strongest winds ever recorded on land.

In a particular way, this visit is meant to express my closeness to our brothers and sisters who endured the suffering, loss and devastation caused by Typhoon Yolanda,” he said.

Francis enjoyed a hero’s welcome when he arrived in the Philippines on the night of January 15, with hundreds of thousands of people crowding the streets of Manila to get a first glimpse of him as he travelled in a motorcade.

The Philippines has long been the Church’s stronghold in the region, with 80 percent of the former Spanish colony’s 100 million people members of the faith.

The high point of the pope’s trip was expected to be an open-air mass on January 18 at a park in Manila, with organisers preparing for up to 6 million people.

If as big as expected, the crowd would surpass the previous record for a papal gathering of 5 million during a mass by John Paul II at the same venue in 1995. It is Francis’ second trip to the region in five months, signalling the importance the Vatican places on Asia’s growth potential for the Church.

BRUSSELS

Terror raids as

BELGIUM was on high alert on January 16 after two suspected jihadists were killed in a police raid, while German and French police made fresh arrests to put Europe on edge a week after the Islamist attacks in Paris.

The series of raids across the continent heightened fears about young Europeans travelling to fight holy war with the Islamic State and other extremist groups in the Middle East, and then returning to launch attacks on Western targets.

In Belgium, officials said they had arrested “assimilant” large-scale attacks on police targets after raiding a terror cell in the eastern town of Verviers, near the German border, whose members had recently come back from Syria.

Police shot dead the two suspects in a gun battle after they opened fire on officers with heavy weapons, and arrested a third man, while there were several search operations in Brussels and its suburbs.

Prime Minister Charles Michel raised Belgium’s terror alert to its second highest level, security was tightened and Jewish schools in the port city of Antwerp closed on January 16 due to fears of further trouble.

The raid and a series of related search operations across Belgium were now “over” but authorities were now seeking to “exploit the information” they had obtained, Foreign Minister Didier Reynders said.

“The threat was to the police forces,” he said of the planned attacks.

Europe has been on alert since the Islamist attacks on January 7 on the French Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine, which printed cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, and a Jewish supermarket in Paris in which 17 people were killed.

With France still reeling from the attacks which targeted its cherished traditions of free speech, US Secretary of State John Kerry was to lay wreaths on January 16 at both the magazine’s offices and the grocery during a visit to Paris.

It follows criticism of the US for not sending a top representative to a march in Paris on January 11.
Europe on alert

which drew 1.5 million people and dozens of world leaders in the wake of the attacks.

The funeral of Stephane Charbonnier, alias Charb, the editor-in-chief of Charlie Hebdo, was also due to take place that day.

Police in France meanwhile detained 12 people overnight in the suburbs of Paris in connection with the attacks, carried out by Islamist brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi and Ayoub Chebbah.

The nine men and three women were to be questioned about “possible logistics support” they may have given to the gunman, in particular weapons and vehicles, the source said.

In Germany an alleged leader of a group planning to carry out an attack in Syria was arrested in raids on suspected Islamist sites in and around Berlin by more than 200 police officers, officials said.

The arrested man is a 43-year-old man of Turkish origin and is suspected of “leading an Islamist extremist group made up of Turkish and Russian nationals from the Caucasus regions” of Chechnya and Dagestan,” the police said in a statement, adding that “there is no indication that the group was preparing attacks inside Germany.”

While there were no direct links between the arrests across the three neighbouring countries, it came on the heels of calls for greater anti-terror cooperation across the EU.

Belgian prosecutors said they had found “no link at this stage” to the Paris attacks but earlier said they suspected a Belgian man could have supplied Jewish supermarket gunman Coulibaly with his weapons.

The suspect, Nutrin Karaslar, had bought a car belonging to Coulibaly’s partner Hayat Boumeddiene, who has since fled France, apparently reaching Syria. He handed himself in to police on January 13.

Belgium has one of the largest numbers of extremists who have returned from Syria relative to its population, with a large Muslim community that suffers from high unemployment and disenfranchisement.

Belgium was also the first country to suffer an attack by a suspected former Syrian fighter after four people were shot dead at the Brussels Jewish museum in May 2014.

Frenchman Mehdi Nemmouche has been charged with murder.

The verdict in a major trial of an Islamist group, Sharia4Belgium, accused of sending young Belgian fighters to Syria is due to be delivered next month. – AFP

LAG05

Boko Haram massacre condemned

US Secretary of State John Kerry branded a Boko Haram massacre in northern Nigeria a “crime against humanity” last week as satellite images suggested massive destruction in the two towns reported razed by its fighters.

“What they have done . . . is a crime against humanity, nothing less,” Mr Kerry said on January 15 as the first images of what is feared to be the worst atrocity of the six-year Islamist insurgency emerged.

Hundreds of people, if not more, are reported to have been killed in attacks on the towns of Baga and Doron Baga on the shores of Lake Chad in Borno state, according to Amnesty International.

Boko Haram was “evil” and a serious threat “not just in Nigeria and the region but to all of our values”, Mr Kerry said during a visit to Bulgaria. He said he had spoken earlier to his British counterpart Philip Hammond, who was also in Sofia, about the possibility of “a special initiative with respect to Nigeria and with respect to Boko Haram.”

Amnesty and New York-based watchdog Human Rights Watch published separate satellite images on January 15 claiming to show massive destruction in the adjacent towns, adding to fears they may have suffered the deadliest strike yet in Boko Haram’s bloody campaign.

Amnesty’s images showed aerial shots of the towns on January 2, the day before the attack, and January 7, after homes and businesses were razed.

The group said the images suggested “devastation of catastrophic proportions”, with more than 3,700 structures – 620 in Baga and 3,090 in Doron Baga – damaged or completely destroyed.

HRW said 11 percent of Baga and 57 percent of Doron Baga was destroyed, most likely by fire, attributing the greater damage in Doron Baga to the fact that it houses a regional military base.

Nigeria’s military, which often downplays death tolls, said that 159 died and dismissed as “sensational” claims that 2000 may have lost their lives in the attacks.

Local officials have said at least 16 settlements around Baga were burnt to the ground and that at least 20,000 people fled.

HRW said the exact death toll was unknown and quoted one local resident as saying, “No one stayed back to count the bodies.

“We were all running to get out of town ahead of Boko Haram fighters who have since taken over the area.”

Amnesty said Boko Haram were believed to have targeted civilians deliberately and with the intention to suffer an attack by a suspect.

Amnesty said the witness accounts received accounts from survivors of Boko Haram fighters killing a woman as she was giving birth, during indiscriminate fire that also cut down small children.

“Half of the baby boy [was] out and she died like that,” the unnamed witness was quoted as saying.

A man in his fifties added, “They killed so many people. I saw maybe around 100 killed at that time in Baga. I ran to the bush. As we were running, they were shooting and killing.”

Another woman said, “I don’t know how many but there were bodies everywhere we looked.”

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said on January 13 that its team in capital of Borno state, Maiduguri, was providing assistance to 5,000 survivors of the attack.

The UN refugee agency has said that more than 11,900 Nigerian refugees fled into neighbouring Chad.

Amnesty said the witness accounts and images reinforce fears the attack was Boko Haram’s “largest and most destructive” in its effort to establish a hardline Islamic state in northeast Nigeria, which has killed over 13,000 people since 2009. – AFP
CAMBODIAN strongman Hun Sen marked three decades as premier on January 14 halting his role in rebuilding the war-torn nation, as rights groups lambasted him for using “violence, repression and corruption” to cling to power.

The former Khmer Rouge cadre became the world’s youngest prime minister when he took office on January 14, 1985, at the age of 32, his humble backstory and sharp wit aiding his reputation for being in touch with ordinary Cambodians.

But his administration has been widely criticised for graft, while Hun Sen stands accused of ignoring human rights abuses, stamping out dissent and rigging elections.

In a report released on January 13, Human Rights Watch accused the 62-year-old of ruling through violence, control of the security apparatus and manipulated elections to become the world’s sixth-longest serving political leader.

“For three decades, Hun Sen has repeatedly used political violence, repression, and corruption to remain in power,” said Brad Adams, HRW Asia director, in a statement.

“Cambodia urgently needs reforms so that its people can finally exercise their basic human rights without fear of arrest, torture, and execution. The role of international donors is crucial in making this happen,” he said.

When Cambodia collapsed into civil war in 1970, Hun Sen became a foot soldier for what later emerged as the Khmer Rouge, the genocidal regime that killed up to 2 million people.

He rose to the rank of deputy regional commander before defecting to Vietnam, eventually returning with Vietnamese troops to oust the regime in 1979 and later climbing to the top of the Hanoi-installed government in Cambodia.

“I thank people who say I am bad. I thank people who say I am good. I thank all of them,” Hun Sen said at ceremony to mark construction work on a bridge over the Mekong River, in Neak Loeng, 60 kilometres (40 miles) southeast of Phnom Penh.

“Without Hun Sen’s hands, there would have no Paris peace agreement,” he said, referring to the 1991 deal giving the UN authority to supervise a ceasefire and democratic elections after years of bloody civil war.

“If Hun Sen did not enter the tiger’s hole, could we arrest the tigers?” added the premier, heralding his role in eradicating Khmer Rouge strongholds. “Indeed I have made some mistakes. But please balance the right and wrong ones.”

As Cambodia emerged from conflict, Hun Sen abandoned the communist dogma of his Vietnamese patrons, embracing the free market and seeking out alliances with more powerful nations.

Yet while Cambodia now enjoys relative stability, the authoritarian premier “has nurtured a system in which political power is based on alliance to the ruling party”, said Raseap Chak, executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights in Phnom Penh.

The government has failed to establish the rule of law or combat impunity … serious human rights violations regularly occur,” she said.

Rising discontent over forced evictions and growing inequality in Cambodia, one of the world’s poorest countries, have led to a surge in support for the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

The CNRP boycotted parliament for nearly a year after accusing Hun Sen of rigging the 2013 general election that returned his Cambodian People’s Party to power. They only took up their seats in July in return for a promise of electoral and parliamentary reforms.

“Any country, for the sake of democracy and progress, has to renew its leadership,” CNRP leader Sam Rainsy said, adding that even communist countries like China and Vietnam change their leaders every few years.

But on January 14 Hun Sen said he would stay in power until at least 2018, when the next general election is scheduled, and that any longer would depend on voters.

He has previously vowed to rule until he is 74. – AFP

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen greets people during a ceremony for casting concrete to connect Neak Loung bridge in Kandal province on January 14. Photo: AFP

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen greets people during a ceremony for casting concrete to connect Neak Loung bridge in Kandal province on January 14. Photo: AFP

‘I thank people who say I am good. I thank people who say I am bad. I thank all of them.’

Hun Sen
Cambodian prime minister
BANGKOK

Surrogates move to have babies returned

The surrogate mothers of nine babies fathered by a Japanese man and taken into care by Thai authorities last year have launched legal proceedings to regain custody of the infants, an official said last week.

The alleged father, who at the time was reported by Japanese media to be the son of an IT millionaire, left Thai land as a surrogacy scandal erupted in August following the discovery of nine babies in a Bangkok apartment.

Tests revealed he is the biological father of at least 15 babies born to surrogates in the kingdom, although his motives for fathering so many children remain unclear.

Thailand's social services have been caring for the nine infants for the last six months, although the mothers have been allowed regular visits.

Six of the mothers, who police said were each paid around US$12,500 to be surrogate, have now launched civil proceedings to get their babies back.


‘We never said the mothers cannot get the children back ... but they need to pass through the ministry’s process.’

Suwanna Pinkaew
Ministry of Social Development

Their lawsuit, filed at a juvenile and family court, alleges that authorities are failing to care for the children and have a child-safe family background, the official added.

Thailand's shadowy commercial surrogacy industry was thrust into the limelight in August 2014 following accusations that an Australian couple abandoned a baby born with Down's syndrome, but took his healthy twin away.

That process includes proving they can care for the children and have a child-safe family background, the official added.

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Thailand's shadowy commercial surrogacy industry was thrust into the limelight in August 2014 following accusations that an Australian couple abandoned a baby born with Down's syndrome, but took his healthy twin away.

The pessimists tend to die.

Zhao Youguang
Inventor of Pinyin

He was attracted to Mao Zedong's Communists because "at that time they promoted themselves as democrats," he wrote.

An amateur linguist who had taught himself some Esperanto, Mr Zhou was assigned in 1955 to co-chair a committee tasked with increasing literacy by reforming the Chinese character system.

China's civil war between the Communists and Nationalists by going to work for a Chinese bank on Wall Street, twice meeting Albert Einstein while visiting friends in Princeton.

But following the Communist victory in 1949, Mr Zhou returned home to teach economics and became a close associate of the party's number two, Zhou Enlai.

"I came back for two reasons: because I thought the country had been liberated, and had a new hope. Also, because my mother was in China," he wrote in a 2012 autobiography.

Though systems for transcribing Mandarin into the Roman alphabet already existed, including Wade-Giles, produced by two British diplomats in the 19th century, Pinyin is regarded as simpler.

"With Chinese characters, you can't tell the pronunciation just by looking. So Pinyin was useful in teaching," said Luo Weidong, a professor at Beijing Language and Culture University. "Pinyin made a big contribution to the literacy movement in China."

In recent decades, Pinyin has become key to the easy creation of Chinese characters on computers.

But Mr Zhou's contributions did not save him from the chaos of Mao's decade-long Cultural Revolution from 1966, during which intellectuals were persecuted.

Mr Zhou, then in his 60s, was sent to work at a labour camp in faraway Ningxia for more than two years, separated from his wife and son.

"I had never slept on an earth bed before," he wrote of the experience, adding, "When you encounter difficulties, you need to be optimistic. The pessimists tend to die."

He has described the two decades from 1960 to 1980 as "wasted": adding, "In all honesty I haven't got anything good to say about Mao Zedong."

He has a higher opinion of Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping, who launched market-style reforms which helped transform China into the world's second-largest economy.

BORN when a Qing dynasty emperor was on the throne, the man who helped invent the Pinyin system used for writing Chinese worldwide turned 109 last week. But Zhou Youguang's outspoken support for democracy means his works are still censored by the ruling Communist party.

"After 30 years of economic reform, China still needs to take the path of democracy," Mr Zhou said, his wrinkled face topped with a patch of white hair. "It's the only path. I have always believed that."

Mr Zhou is commonly known as the "father of Pinyin," a system for transliterating Chinese characters into the Roman alphabet introduced in the 1950s and now used by hundreds of millions of language learners in China, as well as abroad.

But in his cramped third-floor apartment in Beijing, where dog-eared books, including dozens by Zhou himself, line the walls, the writer who celebrated his birthday on January 12 was modest about his achievements.

"I don't have any feeling of pride. I don't think I've achieved very much," he said, speaking slowly but with a calm authority.

The proposal, named Pinyin (putting together sounds), is used in schools across China and has been instrumental in boosting the country's literacy rate from around 20 percent in the 1950s to more than 90 percent today.

But since retiring aged 85, Mr Zhou has written dozens of books arguing that Mr Deng's reforms are insufficient without political change.

"Chinese people becoming rich isn't important," he said. "Human progress is ultimately progress towards democracy."

Mr Zhou, probably China's oldest dissenter, marked his birthday with friends and family, enjoying dishes including braised sea cucumber and a date and mushroom soup, his editor Ye Fang said.

Sleeping takes up an increasing proportion of his time as his health flags, but he is still a voracious reader. Confucius and Socrates remain his favourite thinkers.

Age appears to have been no barrier to a harsh crackdown against critics of the party overseen by China's current President Xi Jinping.

Scores of journalists, lawyers and academics have been arrested and dozens jailed, among them 73-year-old journalist Gao Yu, tried last year for leaking state secrets, and writer Tie Liu, 81, detained since September.

Mr Zhou's books have also come under more intense scrutiny, with topics which could be tackled just a few years ago now taboo.

Censors demanded that his latest book, due out next month, be purged of some references to anti-intellectual movements, as well as a 1950s famine which killed tens of millions as a result of Mao's "Great Leap Forward."

"The restrictions on publishing have got tighter. No one knows if it's a short-term thing or a long-term change," said Mr Ye.

Setting beneath peeling paint in his flat, Mr Zhou said the leader was not the issue.

"I don't think it's a problem of individuals," he said. "It's a problem with the system. We don't have freedom of speech in China."
Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung has conceded it is impossible for Vietnam to ban social media, urging officials in the communist country to instead embrace websites like Facebook to spread the government’s message.

Sites such as Facebook have at times been difficult to access in Vietnam, an authoritarian country which routinely imprisons bloggers and dissidents for criticising the regime.

“You here have all joined social networks. You’ve all got Facebook up on your phones to read information. So we must make this information on your phones to read information. You’ve all got Facebook up on your phones to read information. Now around a third of the country’s population of 90 million have an account on the social network. The government has always denied blocking the site, and for at least a year Facebook has been easily accessible in Vietnam without a VPN or other measures,” Mr Dung said.

Mr Dung said top officials need to use social media to engage with the population more.

“We must publish accurate information online immediately. Whatever is being said online, people will believe official information from the government,” he said.

Vietnam’s communist party controls all newspapers and television networks, and many citizens prefer to get their news online from blogs or social media, which contain less propaganda.

But the quality of the blogs and social media postings is uneven.

Earlier this month, in a rare meeting in Hanoi, top officials need to use social media to engage with the population more.

“We must publish accurate information online immediately … Whatever is being said online, people will believe official information from the government,” he said.

PM has about-face on issue of Vietnam’s Facebook access

The harassment, arrest and prosecution of online activists remain widespread in Vietnam, which is critical distraction,” Mr Dung said, adding that the government would ask ministries to address incorrect information circulating online.

In the past, Mr Dung has driven other measures.

“Incorrect information creates social distraction,” Mr Dung said, adding that the government would ask ministries to address incorrect information circulating online.

The global total of 245 incidents in the region last year was 128 in Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, which has steadily emerged as a new hotspot, with attacks on small tankers rising.

Worldwide, 21 vessels were hijacked last year – 16 of which were in Southeast Asia – compared to 12 in 2013, according to the report released by the IMB’s Kuala Lumpur-based piracy monitoring centre.

Pirates killed four crew members, injured 13 and kidnapped nine from their vessels globally, it said.

“Global piracy incidents have tumbled since then due to a multi-national naval patrol effort launched off East Africa, as well as improved onboard security.”

The regrowth of attacks on small tankers in Southeast Asia reflects the regrowth of attacks on small tankers in Southeast Asia.

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“The global increase in hijackings is due to a rise in attacks against coastal tankers in Southeast Asia,” IMB Director Pottengal Mukundan said in a statement accompanying the report.

“Gangs of armed thieves have attacked small tankers in the region for their cargoes, many looking specifically for marine diesel and gas oil to steal and then sell.”
Denpasar

Bali ‘body in suitcase’ couple appear in court

An American man and his teenage girlfriend went on trial on Indonesia’s resort island of Bali on January 13 charged with murdering the woman’s mother and stuffing her body into a suitcase outside an exclusive hotel.

Heather Mack, who is pregnant, and Tommy Schaefer could face the death penalty if found guilty of the premeditated murder of Sheila von Wiese Mack, 62, whose body was found in the case in the boot of a taxi in August.

Prosecutors alleged that Mr Schaefer, who wept as he entered court, “blindly hit” Von Wiese Mack with a bowl in a fit of rage after she directed a racial slur at him during an argument. Mr Schaefer is black.

“The defendant, overwhelmed with emotion and anger, picked up the glass fruit bowl and swung it at her face,” prosecutor Eddy Arta Wijaya told the district court in the Balinese capital Denpasar, as he read out the 21-year-old’s indictment.

“We tried to push the handle towards Schaefer and it hit his mouth, making him angrier and more emotional. Using both hands, Schaefer blindly hit her as hard as he could between her eyes and nose with the fruit bowl.”

He then continued hitting her face on the bed “until she stopped moving”, he added.

The indictment said that 19-year-old Heather Mack hid in the bathroom during the attack before the couple stuffed the victim’s body in a suitcase.

Mr Mack and Ms Schaefer, who are currently in the boot of a taxi in August.

Local Dutch news reports identified the man as Ang Kim Sui, who was sentenced to death in 2003 for his involvement in producing the drug Ecstasy.

Mr Mack and Ms Schaefer, who went on trial separately, declined to speak to reporters after the trial.

The next hearing will be on January 21. – AFP

Jakarta

Indonesia sets weekend date for drug executions

Indonesia was due to put to death six drug convicts, including four foreigners, last weekend, the first executions to be carried out under new President Joko Widodo’s government.

Mr Widodo, who took office in October, has insisted that he will no longer become a drug haven, and that he will continue to use the death penalty if found guilty of the death penalty, hopefully they can understand that what we are doing is simply to save our nation from the threat of narcotics.”

Jakarta halted executions for five years from 2006 but resumed them after Mr Sukumaran’s appeal was rejected last month.

Two Australians, part of the “Bali Nine” group caught trying to smuggle heroin into Indonesia, and a British grandmother are on death row.

The two others to be executed are an Indonesian and a man whose nationality authorities said was unclear, though the Dutch government later said Jakarta had confirmed the second convict was a Dutch citizen.

Local Dutch news reports identified the man as Ang Kim Sui, who was sentenced to death in 2003 for his involvement in producing the drug Ecstasy.

“This will send a message to members of drugs syndicates. There is no mercy for drug dealers and traffickers,” Mr Prasetyo told reporters.

“The threat of narcotics must be understood that what we are doing is simply to save our nation from the threat of narcotics.”

Mr Chan is still waiting for the outcome of his clemency appeal. After Mr Sukumaran’s appeal was rejected, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott urged Indonesia not to put him to death. The Dutch government also condemned Mr Ang’s planned execution.

“We’ll go to the highest levels to try prevent it from happening,” said Dutch foreign affairs spokesperson Friso Wijnen in The Hague.

Indonesia enforces some of the world’s toughest punishments for narcotics offenses and there is strong public support for putting drug traffickers to death. – AFP
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SYDNEY

PNG detainees swallow razor blades

AUSTRALIAN Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said on January 16 he was worried about a “volatile situation” at a Papua New Guinea asylum-seeker camp after reports that detainees were swallowing razor blades and washing powder.

Australia sends asylum-seekers who try to enter the country by boat to offshore detention centres on Papua New Guinea and Nauru in the Pacific with no prospect of being settled on the mainland, even if they are genuine refugees.

More than 400 boatpeople on Manus Island in PNG have gone on hunger strike protesting against their detention, living conditions and the possibility of being permanently resettled in the Pacific nation, refugees advocates and reporters said.

“I think this is a very serious situation,” Mr Dutton told reporters.

“The worst about developments over the course of the last 24 hours. I’m concerned about what I’ve learnt in the last hour or so. And the situation is volatile there’s no question about that.”

He would not elaborate on what the developments were, but refugee advocate Ian Rintoul said up to 40 men had sewn their lips together, while three others had swallowed razor blades and four had consumed washing powder.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation said it had video from inside the detention centre showing what appeared to be two men being taken away on stretchers after consuming washing powder.

Other footage showed asylum-seekers chanting for freedom.

Mr Dutton, who took on the immigration portfolio in December after a cabinet reshuffle, called on the asylum-seekers to resolve their concerns peacefully and said his appointment did not reflect a shift away from the government’s hard-line policies.

“Whilst there has been a change in the minister, the absolute resolve of me as the new minister and of the government is to make sure that for those transferees, they will never arrive in Australia,” he said.

“I ask people to listen to the directions that they are being given by the staff and by the officers on the ground, so that we can deal with issues peacefully!”

The minister would not comment on individual cases, but confirmed there were “a number of incidents of self-harm within Manus” and the asylum-seekers involved were provisioned with medical help and support.

The protests come a month before the first anniversary of a riot at the camp left one dead and 69 injured after tensions flared among inmates about their fate.

The violence was described in a parliamentary report in December as an “eminently foreseeable” and mostly caused by delays in processing refugee claims.

Some 1035 men are held on Manus Island, according to immigration figures ending December 31. No women and children are detained in the facility.

A total of 895 asylum-seekers, 596 men, 164 women and 135 children, are held on Nauru. –AFP
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Bed linen, bedroom linens, bed clothing, bed covers, bedspreads, bed sheets, bed blankets, bolster cases, bolster protectors, beach towels, bath towels, covers for cushions, curtains of textiles or plastic, comforters, comforter covers, coasters, eiderdowns [down coverlets], face towels, hand towels, handkerchiefs of textile, knitted fabric, mattress covers, mattress protectors, napkins and serviettes, pillowcases, pil- low shams, pillow protectors, table clothes, table mats, quilt covers, shower curtain of textile or plastic, quilts, sleeping bags, table and household linen, table clothes, its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 24.

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Clothing for men, ladies, children and infants; apron (clothing); baby's diaper of textile; baby's suit; pants; bath robes; bathing caps; bow ties; bath slippers; bathing suits; bathing trunks; beach clothes; beach shoes; belts (clothing); berets; bibs; blouses; boots; bermudas; boxer shorts; briefs; brassieres; camisoles; caps (headwear); cap (shower); cum- merbunds; cravats; clothing; gymnasium clothes; cloth- ing of imitation leather; clothing of leather; coats; coats (top); combination (clothing); corselets; corsets; cardigans; chemise; clogs; dresses; dressing gowns; ear muffls (clothing); footwear; furs (clothing); girdles; gloves (clothing); handkerchiefs; hats; headbands; headgear for wear; hosiery; jac- kets (clothing); jerseys (clothing); jeans; jumpers (shirt front); knitwear (clothing); lingerie; mittens; muff (clothing); neckties; night gowns; overcoats; pajama pants; panty girdles; panties; Petticoats; pullovers; polo-shirts; panty hoses; ready made clothing; romper suits; raincoats; sandals; scarves; shawls; shirts; shoes; singlets; skirts; sleepwear; slippers; slips (undergarments); soggy suspenders; socks; sneakers; sport shoes; sport jerseys; slacks; shorts; stocking suspenders; stockings; suits; sun visors; suspenders; sweaters; swimsuits; tee-shirts; tights; trousers; tank tops; underwear; underwear; underpants; underwear; uniforms; vests; wrist- bands; wind jackets; its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 25.

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Sporting articles, instruments and equipment for sports, balls for games; baseball gloves; bats for games; badminton rackets; bicycles (stationary ex- ercise); board games; body building apparatus; card (playing); club (golf); games; golf bags for games; golf bags, with or without wheels; golf gloves; golf tees; golf balls; gymnastics (apparel for); hockey sticks; ice skates; knee guard (sport articles); mobiles (toys); nets for sports, ornaments for Christmas trees; pleats for sports, ornaments; rollers; roller skates; scooters (toys); skates (skating); skis; shuttles (skateboards); skateboards; skates (ice); skis; swim- ming pools (play articles); slides (playthings); table tennis; tennis nets; toys; tennis rackets; machine for physical exercises; sport bags; apparatus for elec- tronic games other than those adapted for use with television apparatus, only skinning equipment, its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 28.

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Quality Developer......Reliable Developer......Responsible Developer
Sex in the city
According to 2013 figures from UN agency UNAIDS, there are an estimated 70,000 sex workers in Myanmar and around 8.1 percent of them are living with HIV. Under Myanmar law, both prostitutes and their customers are committing an offence. An attempt in 2013 in Pyithu Hluttaw to legalise the sex trade following concerns about public health and the plight of sex workers was rejected.

Names have been changed to protect identities.
SINCE the age of two, Thet Paing Htwe Oo has been going to work with his father, the founder of the Htwe Oo marionette theatre, U Khin Maung Htwe. As a small child, he would watch the show intently, and he became a regular in the audience at the shows performed twice a day.

At the age of six, U Khin Maung Htwe gave Thet Paing Htwe Oo his first string puppet as a toy. To U Khin Maung Htwe’s astonishment, instead of playing with the puppet, he took to pulling the strings with the skill of an old hand.

“He had never practised puppetry before that day. I was so surprised when I saw him moving his head and hands like a master,” recalled U Khin Maung Htwe.

Neither of Thet Paing Htwe Oo’s parents was trained in the ancient art. His father was a former sailor with a passion for puppetry. Home from the sea, he founded the puppet theatre in 2006 and enlisted puppeteers.

I saw him moving his head and hands before that day. I was so surprised when he performed to music. Thet Paing Htwe Oo’s mother and elder sister learned the art and joined up. Now, three of the troupe are family members, and the other three are experienced veterans. As his sons talent blossomed, U Khin Maung Htwe took him to international puppet shows held in Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Thailand to perform.

“We have a deep-seated ideal that we have to value the old masters and promote their work. But we have no sense of passing the way for young people with talent,” U Khin Maung Htwe said. “It’s important to encourage the younger generation who inherit the art so that we can preserve it.”

Puppetry, now in decline, has a long and central tradition in the country. In the colonial era, it was puppeteers who inspired audiences to resist British rule. But these days the authorities don’t encourage the art or support enthusiasts’ endeavours to revive it. Aside from pulling strings, Thet Paing Htwe Oo has become interested in sculpting the characters. When his father took him to a puppet-maker’s workshop, he tried his hand at shaping the wood and painting the puppet.

I thought at first he was just playing. But he’s young enough to learn to use the tools. When he grows, I will let him learn puppet-making,” he said.

Prodigy revives the ancient art of puppetry

**ZON PAN N WIN**

Thet Paing Htwe Oo has been performing at his father’s marionette theatre since he was 8 years old.

**Photo:** Yu Yu

includes only six characters, and Thet Paing Htwe Oo is the youngest.

When one of the members died last year and others left, Thet Paing Htwe Oo’s mother and elder sister learned the art and joined up. Now, three of the troupe are family members, and the other three are experienced veterans. As his sons talent blossomed, U Khin Maung Htwe took him to international puppet shows held in Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Thailand to perform.

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Exhibition captures Yangon’s vibrant past

CHARLOTTE ROSE
charlotte.rose@gmail.com

FROM war to natural disasters, political upheaval to struggles for independence, Yangon has been an historical landscape of national and international importance since its founding in 1755. It is a city that has inspired books, films and poetry, and hosted famous visitors from Richard Kipling to Mahatma Gandhi. It also has the greatest surviving collection of colonial architecture anywhere in Southeast Asia. Now the story of Yangon’s colourful history is told through a collection of rarely shown photographs – including a remarkable photo of the great science-fiction writer HG Wells, author of War of the Worlds, at the Rangoon University Boat Club in 1938 – as part of an exhibition that provides a unique insight into the city’s cosmopolitan heritage.

Global City: Yangon’s Past, Present and Future, which will be open to the public until the end of March, showcases more than 120 photographs which reveal Yangon as the centre of key events in the history of Myanmar. Among the other gems on display is a photograph of the old Smart & Mookerdum bookshop on Sule Pagoda Road – the city’s pre-eminent English-language bookshop and a favourite of George Orwell – which was destroyed in the 1990s. The exhibition, organised by Yangon Heritage Trust and held at their beautiful, airy office space on lower Pansodan Street, aims to raise awareness of the unique nature of the urban heritage of Yangon. The Trust says the rare photographs have generated an encouraging amount of interest, including among local residents. “This is not just a photo exhibition. Visitors have the opportunity to see Yangon’s past, the challenges of Yangon’s present days and our vision for the city’s future,” said Moy Yunn Mar Oo, the Trust’s senior communications officer. “The photos also offer an insight into the fashions and culture of the past, such as the so-called ‘Omega’ hairstyle of the 1970s and the traditional costumes of the late 1800s,” she said.

Established in 2012, Yangon Heritage Trust promotes the conservation of Yangon’s heritage buildings. A highlight of the exhibition is a screening of Restoring Rangoon, an Al Jazeera documentary exploring the city’s colonial architecture, including a rare glimpse inside the famous Secretariat building, which alone makes it worth the visit. A rare and much-needed addition to the city’s cultural scene, Global City: Yangon’s Past, Present and Future captures the imagination. Visitors with even the mildest of interest in Yangon’s history will be charmed by some of the quirkier finds such as US Vice President Richard Nixon in Burmese costume in 1953. The Trust did not comment on plans for future exhibitions but one can only hope a permanent display of this kind will be amongst them.

Global City: Yangon’s Past, Present and Future is open to the public every day from 9am until 5pm until the end of March at the Yangon Heritage Trust office on the 1st floor of 22 Pansodan Street (lower block).

Burmese beauty contestants pose in 1949. Photo: Supplied

New York exhibition to show Myanmar Buddhist art for first time

NANDAR AUNG
nandaraung.mcm@gmail.com

OPENING in New York City on February 10, the Asia Society Museum’s Buddhist Art of Myanmar will be the first exhibition of its kind to include loans from collections of Buddhist art in Myanmar. Comprising approximately 70 works spanning the 5th through the early 20th centuries, many of the works on view have never been seen outside Myanmar before.

The groundbreaking exhibition is the cornerstone of a series of programs on Myanmar being presented by the Asia Society – a global non-profit educational organization dedicated to strengthening partnerships between Asia and the United States – with related public lectures, panel discussions, film screenings and musical performances taking place throughout the spring.

“The Buddhist artworks on display – including stone, bronze and wood sculptures, textiles, paintings and lacquer ritual implements – explore how Buddhist narratives were communicated visually and represent a multiplicity of regional styles. Buddhist Art of Myanmar includes loans from the national museums in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw, the Bagan Archaeological Museum, the Sri Ksetra Archaeological Museum and the Kaba Aye Buddhist Art Museum as well as works from the public and private collections in the United States.

Buddhist Art of Myanmar will be displayed from February 10 until May 10 at the Asia Society Museum, 725 Park Avenue, New York City. For more information visit www.AsiaSociety.org/museum

The exhibition showcases over 120 photographs reflecting on Yangon’s cosmopolitan past and present. Photo: Charlotte Rose

Photo: Sean DunGAN

Mara’s Demon Ca. 1479 is one of the works on display at the Buddhist Art of Myanmar exhibition. Photo: Sean DunGAN
As a shutterbug with wanderlust, I am attracted to any trip with sights to see and room for relaxation. Bagan has to be high on anyone’s list of Places to Visit, and I do happen to have such a list. Every New Year, I resolve to tick off some more items. This year, Bagan was one of them, but with a twist – I wanted to see it from a bird’s-eye view.

Arriving in the afternoon, I was too excited to sleep, and eager for the dawn. Already in the early morning the landing site was bustling with crews preparing their giant balloons, resplendent with colours in the rising sun. Boarding was like stepping into a dream. As we ascended, the breeze lifted my hair and caressed my cheeks. The view of temples at sunrise that slowly unrolled beneath our feet was breathtaking. Gusty winds seized us, prompting the captain to announce that we would be landing by the Ayeyarwady River. Our debarkation point turned out to be a glistening sandbank.

I could barely contain my mixed feelings of happiness and sadness as we drifted to earth and landed on the sand bank. The memory of Bagan in the dawn light, the scarlet and gold of the great balloons, and the feel of the wind in my hair as we drifted aloft will never leave me.

Photo Essay

A bird’s-eye view of Bagan

YU YU doublewaine.jan@gmail.com

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3 CARAT GIA DIAMOND

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- 1 Bedroom: 750 sqft
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- 3 Bedrooms + Study: 1200-1300 sqft
- 3 Bedrooms + Study: 1400-1500 sqft
- Duplex (1 Bedroom + 1): 2100 sqft

DUE KEY (2 BEDROOMS) + 1 BEDROOM: 2100 sqft
AQUARIUS  Jan 20 – Feb 18

Make the most of an opportunity that presents itself this week. Only those who dare to fail can ever achieve greatness. A recent undertaking may not have been as positive as expected, but remember that knowing what you don’t want in life is as important as it enables you to make positive changes.

PIECES  Feb 19 – March 20

Approach a difficult conversation with caution this week. Remember that a word let go cannot be called back. Learn how to mix business and friendships successfully, and be sure to devote enough time to both. Face a challenge or competition with strength, zeal and humility.

ARIES  Mar 21 – Apr 19

Do you have the power to get what you want? You have more personal power than you realise, but the challenge this week will be harnessing it to achieve your goals. A networking event will bring you into contact with someone who can contribute what you need to be successful. Cross-cultural exchange may also be beneficial.

TAURUS  Apr 20 – May 20

You may find yourself examining your life in light of choices that are available to you. A difficult decision will present itself mid-week, but delight in the fact that whichever path you take will lead to a new and exciting opportunity.

GEMINI  May 21 – June 20

Refusing to acknowledge criticism will result in an explosive situation this week. Remember that criticism is a gift if it is used for positive self-improvement. A close relationship may cause some anxiety, but trying to inhibit the behaviour of others will cause more harm than good. Distance may help you to get a new perspective. Be mindful of the feelings of others.

CANCER  June 21 – July 22

Embracing change can be difficult, but it is time to get rid of old feelings of fear and approach the new with vitality and energy. Know that you are owned by what you own and focus not on what you want but what you need. An important relationship will improve if you make a commitment.

LEO  July 23 – Aug 22

Your diplomacy skills will be tested later in the week. Be tactful when delivering a difficult message and don’t share your opinions until you have considered the consequences. Reward yourself for your efforts and learn to take solace in the positive results of your perseverance. Courage is the key to a promotion at work.

VIRGO  Aug 23 – Sept 22

Make sure your actions are guided by wise decisions and remember the principle of reciprocity. You may be tempted to choose the wrong path this week, but your efforts should be concentrated on making positive choices. An unexpected social event will lead to improvements in your lifestyle. Be wary of allowing your work to take precedence over important social commitments.

LIBRA  Sept 23 – Oct 22

As you progress, you will inevitably face increasing challenges. Approach them with a cool head and don’t make impulsive decisions. A big opportunity will come your way later in the week. Don’t let it pass you by. Planning a trip will lead to a flourishing romantic relationship, but be mindful of investing in someone else what you cannot afford.

SCORPIO  Oct 23 – Nov 21

Self-confidence is the key to success this week. Present your positive side to the world. Avoid blaming others and taking responsibility for what is not working in your life. Be mindful of others, and be wary of actions that may make you enervate what you should be looking for alliances. Let clarity lead the way.

SAGITTARIUS  Nov 22 – Dec 21

Your social relationships will cause some anxiety this week. Adjust your attitude and focus on quality over quantity and your relationships will become harmonious. The key to a romantic relationship lies in emotional consistency. Use your imagination to overcome a problem that has escalated.

CAPRICORN  Dec 22 – Jan 19

Give something back this week. Doing something to help others will lead to happiness and a positive attitude. Work on building your connections with others. Sympathy is the key to connecting with someone close to you. A romantic relationship will flourish around the 21st, but don’t let your heart rule your head and be careful not to lose sight of what is important to you.

Aries

Leo

Cancer

Libra

Scorpio

Sagittarius

Capricorn

Aquarius

Pisces

Gemi

Gemini

Taurus

Gemini

Cancer

Leo

Virgo

Libra

Scorpio

Sagittarius

Capricorn

Aries

Leo
East meets West

**M** Y husband loves curry and rice but, as an Australian, he’s not as keen as I am on eating it every day. He thinks we eat too much rice at home. I think he eats too much bread. Cooking dinners that satisfy us both isn’t easy, but one solution I’ve found is to cook Western “fusian” dishes that combine Asian ingredients with a Western style of cooking.

This week’s recipe is a quick and easy fusion dish that is ideal for a weekday dinner. No one wants to spend ages cooking after work, and this dish can be whipped up in under 20 minutes, leaving you plenty of time to wind down with your loved ones after a hard day.

I love king oyster mushrooms – also known as Enoki mushrooms – as their texture is similar to scallops. In this recipe, I use fennel butter for a twist on typical fried mushroom dishes.

Now is a great time to cook using fennel – you can buy locally grown fennel in the supermarket, which is much cheaper and fresher than the imported equivalent available throughout the rest of the year. To make the most of this seasonal herb, I’ve also created a simple fennel and apple salad with balsamic dressing to accompany the fish dish.

**PAN FRIED BARRAMUNDO FISH AND KING OYSTER MUSHROOMS IN FENNEL BUTTER**

- 400g king oyster mushrooms
- Approximately 1 tablespoon chopped fennel sprigs
- 1 lemon (cut into wedges)
- Salt and ground black pepper

Lay the fish fillets on some kitchen paper and season with a few pinches of salt and ground black pepper. Roughly chop the fennel.

Cut the stalks off the king oyster mushrooms and slice into pieces about 1 centimetre thick. Core the apple and cut into similarly sized pieces. Add 1/3 of the butter to a frying pan and melt over a low heat. Add 1/3 of the butter to a frying pan and melt over a low heat. Add the fennel to the butter. Next, add the mushrooms to the pan ensuring they are distributed evenly over the pan. Cover the pan and fry the mushrooms for 3 minutes. Turn the mushrooms and cover again to fry for another 3 minutes.

Transfer the mushrooms onto a plate and set aside. Keep in a warm place.

Cut the stalks off the fennel. Wash and drain the stalks, and keep the green fennel sprigs aside to use as a garnish (or to make the herb butter in this week’s other recipe).

Slice the fennel stalks lengthways very thinly. Core the apple and cut into thin slices. Leave the slivered apple to soak in slightly salted water before serving to prevent it from oxidising.

To check it is cooked through, insert the tip of a fork into the fish. If the fish is cooked, the fork should pierce the fish easily.

Arrange the fish fillets on plates along with the mushrooms. Serve with lemon wedges, salt and pepper.

**APPLE AND FENNEL SALAD** 6 servings.

- 2 medium fennel stalks
- 2 medium red apples
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

Arrange the fennel and apple slices in layers on a plate. Pour over the balsamic vinegar.

Add salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

If you have any walnuts, try adding a few to the salad for a delicious variation.

**Restaurant Review**

CHARLOTTE ROSE charlotte.rose@gmail.com

The newest addition to Yangon’s growing list of international restaurant chains, Tony Roma’s is well-known across America for its so-called “legendary” ribs and mammoth portion sizes. As someone who has called “legendary” ribs and mammoth restaurant chains, Tony roma’s is the place to go for a taste of home.

As Tony Roma and his trophy wife beamed down at us from the wall, we turned our attention to the drinks menu. I learned long ago that tequila is best left to the Mexicans, but Tony clearly had a different experience on his high-school skiing trip because every one of the signature cocktails is laced with the stuff. I ordered a “SuperBerry” (K5100) – composed of tequila and cassia extract – while my guest opted for a “Cadillac Top-Shelf” (K5100). Served in huge, inelegant glasses that my guest said made him feel “like a giant”, both tasted like the kind of drink you would expect to be served at a children’s birthday party – sweet, fruity and watered down with mountains of ice cubes.

Tony Roma’s website claims have been called “the best ribs in America”, I ordered a full rack of the “Original Baby Back Ribs” (K22,500), while my guest selected the 10oz rib-eye steak (K25,500). Disappointingly, both dishes were served cold, and the steak – which my guest had ordered medium-rare – was a little on the raw side. Having sent both plates back to the kitchen, they were quickly returned to us in a mildly improved, lukewarm state. You’d be forgiven for thinking an established American chain might know better.

That said, the steak was rich and flavorful and, my guest commented, the best he’d had in Myanmar. The ribs were meaty, though somewhat nondescript, and I’ve never been a fan of the sickly sweet barbecue sauces beloved by restaurant chains.

The only thing I love more than meat is dessert and, on that front at least, Tony Roma’s wins me over. Despite having an “out of a box” taste that seems impossible to avoid in chain eateries, the apple cobbler (desert trio K8500) was delicious – a definite must for Westerners looking for a taste of home.

Overall, the food was tolerable but the saving grace – so often in such establishments – was the staff, who were friendly, helpful and responsive to our picky requests.

If you’re looking for quantity over quality and are prepared to pay through the nose for ubiquitous chain restaurant food (our bill came to almost US$120), Tony Roma’s is your place. Unless you’re a steak fanatic or a reckless spender, however, it’s probably worth giving this one a miss.
Socialite

Guests celebrated the official opening of the Yangon branch of Bolgogi Brothers Korean BBQ restaurant on January 9.

Bulgogi Brothers in Yangon

At Canmake Tokyo’s 3rd anniversary party at the Sedona Hotel on January 16, guests watched as models strutted their stuff on the runway in before enjoying dazzling performances by Phyu Phyu Kyaw Then and Sanii Myint Lwin.

Canmake anniversary party

Guests celebrated the opening of the Yangon branch of restaurant chain Tony Roma’s in Golden Valley on January 11.

A steak-tacular night

Julia Jung, Jin Young Choi and Sarah Jung

Model Ko Phone and Pwint Phyu
A royal event

The opening of the Royal Golden Hotel in Yangon on January 10 gave guests the chance to nosy around the new bedrooms.
### Domestic Flight Schedules

#### Yangon to Baf Pye Taw

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#### Air KBZ (K7)

- Tel: 292777-80, 521083-30 (airport), 375364 (national); Fax: 372983

#### Asian Wings (YJ)

- Tel: 521281-20A, 521420, 521420, 521640; Fax: 532333, 531656

#### FMI Air Charter

- Tel: 248093, 248097, 2481140505

#### Golden Myanmar Airlines (YS)

- Fax: 890591

#### Mann Yadanarpon Airlines (YV)

- Tel: 654619; Fax: 654999, 651720

#### Yangon Airways (YH)

- Tel: 381091, 3819107, 700264; Fax: 562533

### Airline Codes

- Y = Mann Yadanarpon Airlines
- FMI = FMI Air Charter
- K7 = Air KBZ
- Y9 = Air Bagan
- YS = Golden Myanmar Airlines
- YJ = Asian Wings

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#### Air Bagan (W9)

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#### Mann Yadanarpon Airlines (YV)

- Tel: 654619; Fax: 654999, 651720

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I will not go back to that enchanting region. Island-hopping, diving, snorkeling, with the exception of the Tanintharyi region, is still mostly redundant. My Myanmar language skills were pretty much redundant. Myeik is an interesting place to visit, especially for those who want to learn more about the culture and history of the country. The town full of cute little winding streets and markets is another travel adventure in itself, and the town of Myeik turned out to be a little bit of a disappointment for me. I found the surrounding population to be very friendly and welcoming, and the local cuisine is delicious. Thailand.

From Dawei, we hired another minivan (K180,000) to take us on yet another road trip south of Yangon. It was our final night in Myeik, and we spent the evening exploring the town, trying to fit in as many activities as possible before we had to leave the next morning.

The road to Dawei is contentious. It is not really being opened to encourage travelling in large groups who are not up to driving, both Dawei and Maungmagan, about 15 minutes' drive south of Dawei, is a relief after the congestion and stress of deep-sea traffic to open up a land bridge via rail and road across to Singapore and to open up a land bridge via rail and road across to Thailand.

These plans will undoubtedly impact the environment and make major changes to the lives of the surrounding population. One of the most striking aspects of the Tanintharyi Region is its rugged terrain. Jagged mountain ranges are interspersed with hot, flat plains, with gorgeous sun-drenched sandy white beaches as far as the eye can see.

Such pristine coastlines are rare sights, and the solitude of vast stretches of sand and open water is a real relief after the congestion and stress of deep-sea traffic to open up a land bridge via rail and road across to Singapore.
TWO US free climbers who conquered a historic climb of a sheer 960-metre (3,150-feet) rock face in Yosemite National Park called their 10-day journey “a spiritual experience.”

Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson completed the ascent of one of California’s most iconic features, the El Capitan rock formation, on January 14.

The two made the journey up the previously untraversed Dawn Wall, a sheer granite rock face on the massive formation considered one of the most difficult free climbs in the world.

“It felt like a very spiritual experience the whole time. Even now it feels a bit surreal to me,” Caldwell told reporters following the climb. Jorgeson added: “When you would grab that last hold you could literally feel all of the hope, desire and stress drop off of you.”

Free climbing involves climbing with only the hands and feet. The only ropes are fixed from below as a safety precaution.

The two had trained for years and planned months in advance, carefully studying their route up the Dawn Wall.

And during the journey Caldwell and Jorgeson slept in small tents affixed to the rock face and climbed up the ropes to where they had left off for a new day of climbing.

“I think that the camaraderie that we had was crucial,” Caldwell said. “As the two neared the end of their journey, they attracted international attention for the incredible feat.

Dozens of news outlets covered the finale of the climb when Jorgeson and Caldwell were greeted by friends and sprayed with champagne.

US President Barack Obama tweeted words of congratulations with a photo of himself in front of a painting of the notable rock face.

“You remind us that anything is possible,” Obama wrote.

The critical moment for Jorgeson came at the beginning of the month about halfway up the free climb.

Their climbing was divided into sections or “patches” between which their safety ropes were strung. On pitch 15, Jorgeson reached an impasse.

The taller climber needed to reach out with his full wingspan, and hold with just two fingers of one hand to pull himself to the next hold and finish the pitch.

But his fingers, worn down after days of climbing in the cold winter nights, were cracked and cut and he couldn’t reach the hold the taller Caldwell had already completed.

Giving up crossed Jorgeson’s mind, and he considered telling Caldwell to continue ahead without him. “The idea of topping out without Kevin was something I didn’t want to think about,” Caldwell told reporters.

Fortunately, the weather stayed cold and dry, best for climbing because of the friction, and Caldwell said they would stay as long as they needed until Jorgeson could make the spread-eagle move.

Jorgeson had the film crew follow him alone during the journey, so Caldwell could continue the climb when Jorgeson was stuck.

He also said Athletics Kenya needed to consult with the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) on whether Jepkoe should be punished with a two-week ban or with the new mandatory four-year ban that came into force from January 1.

Another hearing will take place in two weeks, he added.

Jepkoe is the biggest name in Kenyan athletics to have been caught cheating, and the scandal has cast a shadow over the astonishing achievements of the east African distance running powerhouse.

The athlete, 33 and the winner of the last two consecutive Boston and Chicago marathons, kept her eyes on the ground and made no comment to reporters as she entered and exited the Athletics Kenya headquarters — maintaining her public silence over the scandal.

Jepkoe’s manager Federico Rosa and coach Claudia Berizelli, both of whom have distanced themselves from the athlete, also appeared before the hearing.

Her estranged husband Noah Busieni — who has implicated Jepkoe in doping offences dating back to 2011 — was also called to testify.

Jepkoe has already been denied the US$100,000 prize for winning the last World Marathon Majors series, and may also be forced to pay back other prize money that has already been paid out.

Kenya’s sports bosses have been accused of inaction on the doping issue, which has cast a shadow over the record-breaking and medal-winning achievements of its fabulously fast distance runners.

They have blamed the current crisis on dishonest foreign agents and managers who are “corrupting” Kenyan runners. — AFP
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Handball cup showcases Qatar sporting ambitions

MOST countries hosting sporting events build several new stadiums and refurbish a few old ones, but such an approach was never likely for uber-ambitious Qatar.

The super-rich Gulf state has gone considerably further by beginning work on building an entire new city from scratch in the desert – Lusail – that will eventually host the football World Cup final in 2022.

Last week the US$44 billion project, some 15 kilometres (10 miles) north of the capital Doha, faced its first high-profile test as the World Handball championships kicked off

Twenty-four teams will contest for a cup made of pure gold. France, Denmark and Spain are among the favourites and Qatar’s national team is predicted to make the quarter-finals.

But it is what happens off the handball court that is arguably far more important for Qatar’s sporting ambitions.

The tournament provides a chance for Qatar not only to host a World Cup, but also to begin to reverse the negative press which has surrounded its sporting ambitions. It is the handball cup that is largely from on-the-job accidents.

The head of the handball organising committee, Thani al-Kuwari, told AFP there had been no fatalities among the 26,000 workers who had worked 31 million man hours a day working on the Lusail project, some 15 kilometres (10 miles) north of the capital Doha, faced its first high-profile test as the World Handball championships kicked off.

The handball provides an opportunity for people to “get to know Qatar” rather than being a country in the desert, he said.

“A somewhat bizarre sight, it is the Lusail Multipurpose Hall – that will eventually host the football World Cup final in 2022. It is the largest single development ever undertaken in Qatar and one of the largest under way anywhere in the world.

When finished in 2019, more than 200,000 people will call Lusail home. It will be the first green city in Qatar, a 38-square-kilometre (15-square-mile) metropolis that will be home to 22 hotels, 36 schools, luxury waterfront homes, a blue lagoon, two golf courses, an underground metro link, tunnels carrying chilled water pipes to cool buildings and shopping malls.

At its heart will be the 86,250-seat Lusail Iconic Stadium that will host football’s 2022 World Cup final. Inevitably, Lusail has become entangled in the continuing scandal over dangerous work practices in the Qatar construction sector.

A report last November in British daily The Guardian said forced North Korean labourers working seven days a week and paid a pittance were behind Lusail’s spectacular rise from the desert. The super-rich Gulf state has gone considerably further by beginning work on building an entire new city from scratch in the desert – Lusail – that will eventually host the football World Cup final in 2022.

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