Heartbeat of the nation

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. NEWS 4

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.

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 SSB officer claimed North Korean ambassador Kim Seok-chol had voiced a complaint about the film’s distribution in a meeting with the Yangon’s 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 cinemas 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.

So, to the film itself. The plot that involves talk of a incinera...
Daw Khin Win's death during a protest last month has only further entrenched opposition to the controversial Letpadaung project.

But in Daw Khin Win’s village of Moe Kyo Plyn, 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 Moe Kyo Plyn from across the country earlier this month 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.

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.

“This [December 22 protest] started when the local people saw the bulldozers destroying our land,” said Ko Kaw 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 – signed a deal with Myanmar and army-owned Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited in 2010.

But since Chinese firm Wanbao said company representatives at Letpadaung were “too busy” to meet journalists last week and referred The Myanmar Times instead to its website.

The morning of the day Daw Khin Win was shot, Monywa Wanbao sent out an upbeat press release with colourul 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, 90, the elder of Daw Khin Win’s two daughters. “But she wouldn’t. She’d stay for a few days and then say she wanted to come back here.”

Daw Khin Win’s daughter, Ma Win Khine, cries outside her mother’s home in Moe Kyo Plyn village, near the Letpadaung mine. Photo: Yu Yu
**Why Myanmar’s tourist numbers are falling**

Myanmar’s tourist arrival figures were swayed by the inclusion of border visitors, but experts warn that the numbers may not be as impressive as they seem.

Tourists and Myanmar visitors watch the sun set from the top of a temple at Bagan.

Photo: Yu Yu

**48%**

Arrivals at Yangon International Airport in 2014 that had a tourist visa

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**WHAT is a tourist and why does it matter? These are the questions being asked in the travel industry following the announcement that Myanmar welcomed more than 2 million tourists in 2014. What should be a cause for celebration is quickly becoming one of concern, with observers urging the government to aim lower and focus on quality, not quantity.**

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**“Myanmar is quite expensive to travel in, and people are still willing to pay because of its historical and cultural character, but this might change in two, three or four years,” said Nicole Haasler, who works on behalf of German government as an adviser to the Myanmar Tourism Federation.**

**These price pressures will only be exacerbated by increased demand. So far, however, calls for moderation have gone unheeded, with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism announcing a target of 4.5 million to 5 million visitors for 2015.**

**The numbers game**

For decades Myanmar’s tourism leaders have been obsessed with achieving even-higher arrival figures. Previous ministers would regularly export private-sector businesses to ignore the reality of the tourism boycott and invest in marketing and infrastructure to reach the magical 1 million mark.

But why are tourism arrivals important to the government? Sean Turnell, an economist at Australia’s Macquarie University, said one attraction is that the country is too small for it to be shot.”

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**In-depth**

**Thein KEAN**

**“The government spoke to me [on January 6] to ask if I would consider coming to Myanmar for my mother’s death. They did not say how. But what I feel is if they think they can shoot someone’s mother and then just give them money to solve the problem, the same thing should happen to them and they can see how they feel,” said Daw Khin Win’s younger daughter, Ma Win Khine.**

**“My mother [took no action] against the army because she was too old to deal with it. It was too much for her to be around our land,” Daw Than Mya said. “They took 8 acres from me. That is all I had. They have turned me into a beggar. I have to ask my neighbours to give me enough food for my cows to not die. I am worried that the animals and people will all die.”**

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**“The government is quite small, it is a mixture of anger and despair. His fist hits the wooden table and his eyes fill with tears as he discusses the impact of the mine on area residents. Before the latest land confiscation it had been financially comfortable, he said, and had recently started building a bigger house. “I can’t bear this. I want ‘the truth’ about the mine. I want to be compensated for my mother’s death. I want my land. How am I going to feed my children? The land Wanbao had recently fenced off has been in his family for generations. Farming, he said, is what keeps my family going.”**

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**“Myanmar’s tourist arrival figures were swayed by the inclusion of border visitors, but experts warn that the numbers may not be as impressive as they seem.”**

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**‘I believe it would be more healthy and responsible – for leisure tourism … to follow rather a conservative or mid-range [growth] scenario.’**

Nicolle Haasler
Myanmar Tourism Federation adviser

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**Tourists and Myanmar visitors watch the sun set from the top of a temple at Bagan.**
Myanmar’s tourist arrival figures were swelled by the inclusion of border visitors, but experts warn that the push for high growth at any cost could have negative long-term impacts for sector.

Why Myanmar’s tourist numbers don’t add up

Tourists and Myanmar visitors watch the sun set from the top of a temple at Bagan.

Photo: Yu Yu

The push for rapid growth has then more tourists will come.”

value for money yet,” he said.

services do not offer good enough

ment’s] target but hotel rooms and

tinations would also stimulate growth.

Improving airports, expanding online

recommend the country to others. My-

tries, but also competitors like Egypt

ly spread [to] help the development of

infancy, there is an opportunity for the

and not just at a few destinations.

As Myanmar tourism is still in its infancy, there is an opportunity for the country to ensure it develops sustaina-

ble tourism... [so that] wealth is wide-

ly spread [to] help the development of

various communities throughout the country.”

Zaw Win Than
zawwintan@gmail.com

TOURIST arrivals through Yangon International Airport hit a record high in 2014, rising more than 20 percent, figures from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism show.

The number of foreign visitors arriving through the Yangon gate-

way increased 21.1pc to 973,591, up from 803,014 in 2013.

About 604,206 visitors, repres-

enting more than 70pc of total ar-

rivals, were from Asian countries, in-

cluding 165,661 from Thailand, the largest single group, followed by Japan with 76,066 and China with 76,069.

European nationals accounted for 166,981 travellers, represent-

ing 17.16pc of total arrivals. France led the way with 54,305 visitors, followed by the United Kingdom with 33,944 and Germany with 26,504.

The figures also showed a 74.83pc rise in package tourists, with 48,304 people arriving in 2014, up from 27,207 the previous year. Tourist visa arrivals made up 468,486, or about 48pc, and were up almost 30pc overall. Meanwhile, the number of free independent travellers (FIT) showed a modest rise of about 5pc to 420,180, up from 400,381 in 2013.

The ministry also predicts 166,981 travellers, represent-

ing 17.16pc of total arrivals. France led the way with 54,305 visitors, followed by the United Kingdom with 33,944 and Germany with 26,504.

The ministry announced recently that tourist arrivals through all major gateways includ-

ing Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw and Bagan airports and

border checkpoints, made up more than 3.05 million tourists in 2014 and earned US$11.14 billion in direct revenue.

Tourism numbers have been on the rise since the country began to open up as the military régime 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 popu-

lar destinations in the centre of the country, such as Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake.

U Phyo Wai Zaw, chair of Myanmar Tourism Marketing (MTM), said the shortage of hotel rooms at major tourist destinations and the lack of a well-trained work-

force would be the major challenges for the sector in 2015.

He spoke of the need to promote new destinations such as Loikaw in Kayah State and Thandwe near Taunggyi, Bago Region, to relieve the influx of arrivals on the establish-

ed sites.

Ma Su Su Tin, managing direc-

tor of Excitissimo Travel in Yangon, said her company’s business grew about 5pc in 2014.

“I think Myanmar is still con-

sidered as an expensive destina-

tion, 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,” she said.
IDPs urge UN rep to push for travel rights

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DISPLACED persons living in camps in Rakhine State told the visiting UN special rapporteur for human rights on January 9 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.

“Whether 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 Taungpaw 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,” she told the press.

Ms Lee also 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 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 one – she said the situation “remains at crisis stage”.

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.

On her second visit to the country, Ms Lee told reporters that the rights situation in Rakhine State now appeared to be “backsliding” in several areas.

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 demonstrations, 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”.

“Indeed, 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 78 farmers and protesters at the Let-padaung copper mine had been on trial for two years for allegedly making “false charges” against the military. The charges were filed after he submitted a complaint to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission over the death of his daughter, 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 report to the UN 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

“Much more is needed” in Rakhine: UN
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

He said, adding that the association filed complaints about water quality.

The matter came to light at the 4th 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 liter 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 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.

Daw Thin Su Kyaw refused to name the brands concerned, citing “ethical concerns,” but said they were very popular. She said contamination was discovered in samples the FDA had refused to name the brands concerned.

“We are spending a lot of time and money boiling water to make it safe, so finally we started using bottled water. Sometimes it smells strong, but we don’t know why,” she said, adding that she thought the FDA should release the names of the dirty water companies.

55% Brands of water tested in 2012-13 that failed to meet FDA standards

Food, cosmetics testing lab to open in Nay Pyi Taw

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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 Tint, 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 Myaung and Bago regions and Shan State, including Yedashe, Taungoo, Pulinang, and Thanlwin areas. 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 Pyin Oo Lwin township, said there were many products on sale that are not tested. “In summer, for example, ice cubes go on sale,” he said, “but nobody knows where they come from or what they contain.” – The Myanmar Times
Crackdown begins on errant monks

AUNG KYAW MIN

MORE than 40 mendicant clergy, including imposters 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 pretences, 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 abbot's 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 townships in the countryside," said U Suryundhana, the deputy chair of Yangon Region Sangha Rules Preservation 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 Mang
US rights rep cautions MPs over religion bills

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

The bills, which are likely to be discussed during the parliament session that begins on January 19, have been widely criticised 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.

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


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

He also called for humanitar-ian groups to be granted to those affected by conflict in Rakhine State and northern Shan State as soon as possible.

Deputy rector snatches student flag during rally

“It was a peaceful protest,” said student union member Ko Yeyint Paing Hnin. “But he followed us in his car and blocked us. The journalists who were there saw how dangerously he was driving.”

The students said they would continue to protest against the law, which was enacted last year, and that there would be more of them next time.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun
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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

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.

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$1.17 billion) for the social protection plan 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,” said Daw Mo Mo, 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 conjunction 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 1pc by 2060.

U Kyaw Lin Htet, deputy director of the Department of Social Welfare, said that figure could change when the results of the March 2014 census are released. “That figure was calculated by United Nations based on a population of 54 million but the 2014 census found a population of just over 52 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 3.5pc in 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.

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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 conjunction 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 1pc by 2060.

U Kyaw Lin Htet, deputy director of the Department of Social Welfare, said that figure could change when the results of the March 2014 census are released. “That figure was calculated by United Nations based on a population of 54 million but the 2014 census found a population of just over 52 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 3.5pc in 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.

“When we want to allocate stalls according to the goods they sell. The smaller spaces are not suitable for the 400 retailers. But the chair minister didn’t respond to our complaint about the inconvenience. We also approached the township management committee for the market, but the chair minister didn’t demonstrate if there is no change in their position;” said Daw Mon Mon Shin, secretary of the market committee.

The principal 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 who originally promised 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 Thiri Min Htan
**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.

**Yangon court rejects suit over Kempinski-linked hotel**

Flying Tiger managing director U Thein Htike 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 $60 million in financial support for the renovation of the building.

The Ministry 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.
**CRIME IN BRIEF**

Father Land owner in court

The owner of Father Land Construction, U Kyaw Myint, appeared in a Kyauktada courtroom on January 13 to face charges of cheating and forgery. Landowner U Soe Min Htet filed a case against U Kyaw Myint in September after hiring him to develop a 12-storey building on a 100-by-68-foot lot on the middle block of Pansodan Street in Kyauktada, four years ago. U Kyaw Myint allegedly forged the signature of the land owner and construction remains incomplete. In a separate case, Betehtawung police say they are looking into the case but the victim was unable to recall the taxicab’s licence number.

**Teacher hospitalised after robbery**

Kamaryut police were called January 11 after Chinese national Duo Geng, 24, arrived at Yangon General Hospital with several wounds. Duo Geng, a Chinese middle-school teacher, hired a taxi in front of Sedona Hotel in Yanink Township. When she was opening her purse, the driver allegedly got out, throttled her neck and hit her with the car door. When she collapsed, the driver drove off with K30,000, a laptop, a pair of shoes and a mobile phone. Police say they are looking into the case but the victim was unable to recall the taxicab’s licence number.

**Taxi goes over railing**

A taxi plunged off a bridge January 8, sending the driver and passengers to hospital. U Sai Paing, 32, of Thaketa township was driving a Honda Fit taxi when it stuck the railing of Min Ye Kyaw Swar bridge while driving from Tarmwe to Thingangyun and went over the edge. The driver sustained injuries to his right thigh, while passengers U Tin Aung See and Daw Thaw Hlating Myint of Thingangyun township received multiple injuries and were rushed to Thingangyun Central Hospital. Tarmwe police are charging the driver under section 338/279 of the Penal Code.

**Laborers fix a fishing net aboard a trailer at a port in Pattani, southern Thailand, in September 2013. Photo: AFP**

**Thailand prisoner plan prompts protest**

**BILL O’TOOLE**

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NEARLY 50 human rights groups have released an open letter to the Thai government criticising a proposed program that would put prisoners to work on fishing boats in the Andaman Sea.

The January 15 letter was signed by 45 Thai and international human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the Bangkok-based Migrant Workers Rights Network.

The groups said the program “poses a serious threat” to the human rights of the prisoners.

"Use of these labourers will violate international human rights standards and codes of conduct of many international companies," the letter said.

First announced in December 2014, the program has been touted by the Thai military government as a solution to a labour shortage that officials claim is driving many fishing companies to rely on unregulated trafficking networks to find workers for their vessels.

The letter notes that several investigations in recent years have documented widespread exploitation of workers on Thai fishing vessels. The vast majority of these workers are undocumented migrants from Myanmar and Cambodia.

These investigations “exposed horrific working conditions, including human trafficking, debt bondage, physical abuse, murder, non-payment of wages, confinement and 20-hour working days on some Thai fishing boats.”

By implementing this initiative, Thai human rights organizations say the Ministry of Labour’s failure to uphold basic rights in the fishing industry casts doubt on this promise.

“While the Thai government said only prisoners who volunteer will be put to work on the boats, rights groups say the Ministry of Labour’s failure to uphold basic rights in the fishing industry casts doubt on this promise.”

“Thailand government is not in a position to fulfi l the [Ministry of Labour’s] claims that prisoners placed on these ships will be treated in line with Thai labour law, nor can it provide reasonable assurances that these prisoners will not end up in conditions of forced labour”.

As of 2014, Thailand is designated as a “Tier 3” nation in the US State Department’s annual Trafficking in Persons Report, which is reserved for countries “whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so,” according to the State Department. Other Tier 3 nations include North Korea, Syria and the Central African Republic.

The statement said the fishing program could “threaten any possible upgrade” of Thailand’s ranking on the list.

“If implemented, this initiative could strengthen arguments that the Thai government is unwilling to take serious steps to address human traffi cking on fishing boats,” it said.
Myanmar's 180 state-run vocational schools will be given a new focus to support the needs of employers and to help those without a formal education to gain a job, while at the same time develop their income and in turn reduce poverty, he said.

The committee'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 to meet demand from foreign investors for skilled workers. The intent is to issue certificates that would be recognised by other ASEAN countries.

- Translation by Thiri Min Htun

Mogok residents urge upkeep of historic British war cemetery

Number of headstones left in the cemetery at Ywar Thar Yar, which contains the remains of British soldiers killed in the 1880s and 90s.

A CENTURY-OLD burial spot for British dead in Mandalay Region has fallen into disrepair and needs a clean-up, according to those who live nearby.

They say the cemetery, located just under 15 kilometres (9 miles) north of Mogok, at Ywar Thar Yar, should be properly maintained and also promoted as a tourist site.

"Since foreign visitors were allowed to visit Mogok, 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 are ruining the land and its memorial stones."

Myanmar hosts three well-known British World War II military graveyards, near Nathawaddy Roundabout in Yangon, at Thayayay north of Yangon and at Thanbuzayat 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, Mogok 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 cemeterylook 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 Bernwardmyo, after British commissioner of Upper Burma Sir Charles Bernard, until it was officially renamed by the former military government.

- Translation by Zar Zar Soe
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 last seen alive on December 22 and was later confirmed dead in a jade mine in the Letpadaung area of Sagaing division.

The police told the commission that Daw Khin Win died from a gunshot wound to the head. The area is a jade-rich region of Kachin, Birmania and Kachin ethnic organisations, the Peace-talks Creation Group, said they were negotiating with the Tatmadaw, KIA and Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) said they were negotiating with the Tatmadaw, KIA and Kachin Indigenous Peoples’ Army (KIA) said they were negotiating with the Tatmadaw, KIA.

The KIA said the fighting started at 9pm on January 14 in Salingyi township with the capture of the KIA battalion headquarters. The police bodyguard during an inspection in the Letpadaung area said that Daw Khin Win died from a gunshot wound to the head.

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According to the United Nations and Kachin ethnic organisations, more than 100,000 people have been displaced by the conflict, many living in isolated and impoverished IDP camps.

Civil society submits suggestions on election observers

CIVIL society organisations have submitted proposed changes to a draft code of conduct and regulatory framework 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 Oo 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 Oo 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. “CSEs are not working under the UEC. We are independent,” she said.

U Thant Sin of the 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 earlier this month that the election would be held in October or November.

Tatmaday, KIA clash in Hpakant

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

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 mining areas of Myaung, Kamine and Hpakant.

The minister has now been released, but the three police officers are still 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 Corporation, a military-owned company.

The KIA said the fighting started at 6:30am in Kame village, near the base of the KIA No 6 Battalion, with an artillery attack by the Tatmadaw.

The Peace-talks Creation Group (PCG) said they were negotiating with the Kachin State government, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and other Kachin ethnic groups to resolve the conflict.

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

U Zaw Htay, 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 at the MPC, said he doubted the clashes would affect ongoing peace talks, which are expected to resume in the last week of January.

According to the United Nations and Kachin ethnic organisations, more than 100,000 people have been displaced by the conflict, many living in isolated and impoverished IDP camps.
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At Kyaikhtiyo, wildlife trade on open display

At Kyaikhtiyo, 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 transportation 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 protected areas, the wildlife trade is clearly a threat. At Kyaikhtiyo, 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 transportation over the past 20 years have made it much more accessible, leading to an explosion in visitor numbers.

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PAINSTAKING work to strip off layers of lime from Ananda Pagoda’s whitewashed walls – the legacy of an ill-advised restoration campaign

Historian and archaeologist Tam-pawaddy U Win Maung said the whitewashing of art-covered pagoda 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.

“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. All they know is to paint the temples sheer white, which destroys the authenticity,” he said.

“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.

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

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

‘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.’

Tam-pawaddy U Win Maung
Historian and archaeologist
FRESH FRUIT, VEGETABLE, MEAT & FOOD

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KOREA SINKO PEAR (Korean Pink Apple) 1kg
NEW ZEALAND ENVY APPLE (100g - 110g)
KOREA SINKO PEAR (Korean Pink Apple) 1kg
USA POMEGRANATE 1kg
MYANMAR PAPAYA 2kg (12 pieces)
USA LEMON 1kg
MYANMAR CAESAR SLICE 500g
AUSTRALIA ICEBERG LETTUCE 1pc
BUNASHIMEJI BROWN MUSHROOM 150g
LZ SOFT SHELL CRAB 250g
KRAFT Philadelphia Cream Cheese Patti 225g
CP German Sauerkraut 1kg
MEET & TASTE Pancake & Waffle Mix 1kg

BEST CHOICE

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MUNCHY'S Croissant Cream Cheese-Cracker 2pc $1.65
FERREIRA ROCHER Nutella & Butter Chocolate Cream 35g
MALAY MALAY Almond & Lychee 400g
UNI Instant Noodles 3pc $0.65
BURBERRY Milk Chocolate Squares 40g
JUICY JUICE Orange Juice 300ml
HERMA Mayonnaise 58g
HAUTIERE Iced Tea 6pc $4.68
HERNIE Cheese 300g
CP Cheese Crackers 30g
COOK King Size Salted Egg 1kg

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SENSODYNE Toothpaste 150g
BERMAN Toothpaste with Clean Complete 90g
LUX Bar Soap 3 x 80g
ELIZAER Shower Cream 500ml
SILK-N SHINE Hair Cool 300ml

C' CARE Body Lotion 400ml
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Shackled press hinders Vietnam's progress

A WEEK ago, senior members of the ruling Vietnam Communist Party gathered in Hanoi to thrash out several crucial issues, though the people of that nation and others across the region knew little about it. It was partly because Vietnamese affairs, including the names of people and places, are difficult to convey and hence receive scant coverage. Mostly, though, it is because the country's media is hardly press-repressed.

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.

A statement issued after last week's meeting said, “The government must ensure that the press is not purely run for profit, nor influence-based, neither must it be allowed to fall into private hands.”

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).

Khe defined “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 conclusive, 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 circum-scribed, 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 VCP members now have their own well-known blogs where they chastise the regime and draw thousands of hits each day.

Naturally, Hanoi throws up firewalls, but they are easily circumvented and the bloggers' views are widely disseminated, as occurred when it was discovered that last week's party meeting had veiled its vote to judge the performance of the top members 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 of many party leaders.

Those receiving negative or could-do-better ratings included PM Nguyen Tan Dung, defence minister Phung Quang Thanh, public security minister Le Hong Anh, and party boss Nguyen Phu 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 scabrous and sordid, but - in a salutary lesson to other repressive governments in this region - it tends to be believed.

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 dissidents.

Vietnam is the world's fifth-worst jailer of journalists - a record that draws castigation from governments around the world and stymies Hanoi's attempts to improve its image. And that upsets party leaders and caused them to concede, in a rare public comment about last week's deliberations, that they must “make stronger efforts to stop politi-cal and moral degeneration within the party.”

Corruption and crony capitalism continue to be the prime bugbear, 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 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 emer-gency and imposed harsh media controls.

Most reporters abjectly obeyed, causing the state opposition leader LK 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.
What does Beijing want from Myanmar?

After the 1962 military coup, when the dictator General Ne Win took office.

In 1965, anti-Chinese riots broke out and a number of Chinese were killed and injured. The Chinese embassy was also attacked.

In June 1967, a Chinese volunteer army flying the flag of Burma Communist Party staged attacks in the Shan State border areas.

Because of these attacks, the BCP could establish a foothold in northeastern Shan State.

Later, however, U Ne Win tried to improve ties with China. After Deng Xiaoping took office in 1978, China stopped its assistance to 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 Kyaw-shin.

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

China has also been unable to start work on a proposed Muse-Kyaungkky railway project, as well as the Kyaungkky special Economic Zone that Beijing wants in order to develop its Two-Ocean Strategy.

At the same time, the government wants to sign a nationwide ceasefire but some ethnic armed groups, including the Kachin Independence Organisation, are opposed to the deal. Other groups that want to sign are reluctant to split the ethnic bloc.

In this context, the Chinese government plans a very important role. The KIO can only take on the Tatmadaw because it has the financial means to buy weapons and other supplies. Almost all of its income comes directly or indirectly from China. Illegal gems extraction, logging and other trading is all done with China and almost all weapons are bought from China, too.

If Beijing really wants to build peace in Myanmar, it can start by showing the KIO that while it is in conflict with the government it is totally dependent on China for its survival.

But rather than encouraging ethnic armed groups to sign the ceasefire, China appears to be aiding an old warlord, Pheung Kyaw-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 Kyaw-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

ANALYSIS

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.

Mr. Aung Myo Tha2, 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. He recommended regulators in particular must ensure that listed companies are transparent and investors are educated and provided with relevant information, or risk being cheated.

Shares in YSX-listed firms will need to compete with other capital investment vehicles, 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 exchange," he said.

Deputy finance minister U Maung Maung Thaing has said market participants such as brokers and underwriters will be invited to begin applying the stock market appeal.

However, the crucial rules governing the conduct and ethics of those participants have not yet been released, said U Soe Thein. He added, "The market will be impacted depending on their rules." Myanmar Oriental Bank chair U Ma Tha Than said it is unlikely the stock market will initially attract much money that is currently stored in bank accounts.

Bank deposit interest rates start at 8 percent, providing an attractive return, particularly in a low-inflation environment. U Mya Than said some of the heat is now leaving the property market, meaning many are leaving their 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 audit 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 Agribusiness have declared their interest in listing, with some putting their plans on hold after the official ban. Other companies are considering listing, but only "a few companies are willing to disclose their profile, which will be a challenge," Mr. U Soe Thein said. He added, "We have to invite them to begin applying the stock market appeal."

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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 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, three of the rules and regulations needed to licence 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.

"So 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 them are small island countries, and the other two 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 Aung Thura, CEO of Thura Agri-business Public Company – one of the companies interested in listing, 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 we can't reveal it now," he said.

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TRADE MARK CAUTION

NOTICE is hereby given that KIRIN KABUSHIKI KAISHA (also trading as KIRIN Company, Limited) of 10-2, Nakano 4-Chome, Nakano-ku, Tokyo, Japan is the Owner and Sole Proprietor of the following trademarks: -

KIRIN

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in respect of: – “Beer, carbonated drinks (refreshing beverages), fruit juices, vegetable juices, whey beverages, extracts of hops for making beer” – Int’l Class: 32

“Alcoholic beverages (except beer)” – Int’l Class: 33

KIRIN

(Reg: Nos. IV/7874/2008 & IV/3340/2013)
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KIRIN

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in respect of: – “Edible oils and fats; margarine; milk products; milk beverages, milk predominating; lactic acid drinks; lactic acid bacteria drinks; drinking yogurts; butter; cheese; curd; cream (dairy 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; fresh fruits; processed meat products; charcuterie; meat extracts; processed fisheries products; gelatine for food; processed vegetables and fruits; tomato juice for cooking; dried vegetables; vegetable juices for cooking; dried fruits; tomato purée; weed extracts for food; jams; peanut butter; marmalade; abura-age (fried tofu pieces); kohri-dofu (freeze-dried tofu pieces); konnyaku (jelly made from devils’ tongues root); soya milk (soy 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; ochazuke (dried flakes of liver for sprinkling on rice in hot water); furai-kake (seasoned powder for sprinkling on rice); side-dish made of fermented soybean (name-mono); raw pulses; protein for human consumption; albumen for food; casen for food; hydrolyzed protein used as a food additive or for baby food” – Class: 29

Continued to page 27
Petrol station problems lead to constant Thein Phyu queues

Road is quality. The Max station has gained a reputation as an honest broker, not mixing water in its fuel, according to drivers.

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

U Kyaw Zay Myint
Max Energy

“I buy my petrol from the station because it’s of good quality,” said Ko Zin Myo, a Tarmwe 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 in the fuel,” he said. U Kyaw Zay Myint said Max Energy is careful with the petrol it imports, with shipments coming directly from Singapore, but other shops are not always so meticulous. While drivers say they are queuing at Max to avoid watered-down fuel at some other stations, it is actually poorly-stored petrol they are avoiding.

Government officials have said they are taking aim at shops with poor-quality fuel. From September 2012 to June 2013, inspections teams caught 65 filling stations with impure fuel, out of 185 tested stations. In November 2014, deputy energy minister U Aung Htoo announced the ministry had imported six mobile fuel laboratories that will carry out roving inspections through the 1300 stations in the country.

Citizens will be able to complain about specific stations and then have them inspected by the teams, he added.

Paying the price

No relief yet for air travellers

PLUNGING 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, Air Asia, Yangon 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 tickets at promotional rates, so cannot immediately reduce tickets, 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 its services, including Singapore, Bangkok and Myanmar — where government-owned Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise holds a monopoly on jet fuel.

“Time will tell at the convenient airport. Sometimes MEPPE 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 hesitant to reduce ticket prices even though the cost of jet fuel is on the decline.

U Min Thwin, past 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.

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 its 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.

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.

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U Kyi Win Associates
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Phone: 372416

Dated: 19th January, 2015
Overcoming ridicule to snap up selfie sticks

A grim-faced photographer wields a selfie stick in Bagan. Photo: Thiri Lu

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.

"I don’t like taking selfie photos, let alone using a selfie stick," she said. "Sometimes I see young girls taking 7 or 10 photos in different positions in a restaurant, 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.

THE PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS CEREMONY AND GALA DINNER WILL BE HELD AT SULE SHANGRI-LA, YANGON ON WEDNESDAY 13 MAY 2015.

CATEGORIES

DEVELOPER
Best Developer
Best Boutique Developer
Special Recognition in CSR

BEST OF THE BEST
Best Commercial Development (Myanmar)
Best Residential Development (Myanmar)

DEVELOPMENT
Best Condo Development
Best Office Development
Best Retail Development
Best Hotel Development
Best Serviced Apartment Development
Best Housing Development
Best Resort Development
Best Renovated Property
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)
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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.

EARNINGS 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.

After investing about K1000 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 Unity, one of many multilevel firms that have set up in Myanmar in recent years.

Her current income from Unity reaches up to K300 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.

Unity international grew out of two merged American nutrition companies that have a combined operating history of 250 years, according to 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 the rules and regulations and international best practices. It also maintains a 100% money-back guarantee,” the firm’s website says.

“Anecdotal evidence indicates that there are a range of legitimate and network marketing firms operating in Myanmar. Besides Unity, representatives of up to 10 companies like AirStar Network and Jenessa Global have been advertising in the country.”

Mr Rose said, it was “a little bit another way to flip a product.”

While Myanmar has passed a 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.

Unskilled workers and consumers are at risk, Mr Rose said.

“Some farmers lost interest in farming and switched to just multilevel marketing, selling their farms to join the businesses because they hoped they would become rich,” he said.

Some developing countries have avoided multilevel marketing and have limited its use, he added.

Aung Kyaw said he is particularly concerned that some unscrupulous companies could be selling defective and possibly dangerous products, such as goods claiming medical benefits.

He urged the Food and Drug Administration and the Ministry of Commerce to focus more attention on customer protection issues. Ms Rose said it will be a piece-by-piece process to improve consumer protection in Myanmar.

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Casinos double down for 2015

GAMBLING billionaire Lawrence Ho expects Macau’s casino revenue to grow in 2015, betting his new resort and other openings will help lift the industry from last year’s doldrums.

Melco Crown Entertainment, headed by Mr Ho and his Australian billionaire partner James Packer, on January 12 said it plans to woo vacuum-cleaning Chinese with a family entertainment centre that 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 2014 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 China, how many more millionaires 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 the rise of the middle-income earnings demographics. These are the younger people who want to travel, experience the world.”

Melco rose 1.2 percent to close at HK$61.3 in Hong Kong trading on January 13. Galaxy led the rally in other casino stocks with shares up 2.7pc.

Mr Ho, the son of 85-year-old Macau 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-profil,” he said.

“One 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-gaming 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 over 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, owing to ongoing gasoline and logistical concerns are also of prime importance.

Brent, a benchmark crude, dropped to US$84 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 the new cars, investment dollars and logistical concerns are also of prime importance.

Brent, a benchmark crude, dropped to US$84 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 the fuel prices at private stations.

U Kyaw Zaw, executive director of Max Energy, said the state firm still imports petroleum products to supply the government's needs, which requires imports of nearly four million gallons annually. It then sells surplus to the private sector, though not at a large amount.

The Myanmar Petroleum Trade Association is the industry body that regulated licences to import and distribute fuel. The association is chaired by businessman U Tay Za, and counts other prominent entreprenuers on its executive committee. It currently has about 70 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 handle the quality and quantity of the fuel market, and would like to be allowed to sell more premium products.”

U Win Myint said the price is determined not only by the cost of imports, but also transportation, storage and tax. Some firms are also able to take advantage of economies of scale, while other smaller firms often rely on wholesalers.

Actually, the price isn’t falling as much as people expected because there is not enough competition,” he said, pointing to challenges gaining investment in the infrastructure needed to import and distribute fuel.

There are 1863 private filling stations in the country, according to data from Myanmar Petroleum Products Enterprise. Yet with much of the supply chain outside Myanmar’s grasp, it can be difficult gaining value from falling oil.

Max Energy’s U Kyaw Zaw Myint said adding refining capacity through the planned ThakinHpya refinery renovations will go a long way to improving the situation.

“If the refinery is here the price will go down, and we can compete with worldwide price,” he said. Until this happens, though, local drivers looking for a cheap fill-up are reliant on international forces.

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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 #016442) to provide communications support to project 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.

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, and 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.

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Programme Analyst, Gender

Type of Contract: Fixed Term

Grade: NO-B

Duty Station: Yangon

Deadline: 05 February 2015

Applications should be addressed to UNFPA’s 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.
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, downplaying a major corporate reshuffle.

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

Hong Kong developer Cheung Kong Holding’s 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 telecommunications, 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 remove assets from China and Hong Kong to a huge bet against yuan-denominated assets – and insisted such a move would mean little given changes to China’s 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 possessing 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 all proved to deviate from reality.”

Li Ka-shing gestures, though not at China state media. Photo: AFP

Mr Li had been Asia’s richest man since 2012, but was surpassed by China’s Internet entrepreneur Ma in December, Bloomberg News reported.

The paper praised Mr Li for having contributed to China’s economic reforms and opening to the outside world, but said his role as a wealth-fueled entrepreneur has likely withered.

“He is worthy of the nickname ‘Superman’, but he may not be suitable as a bellwether for the future,” it said.

“We should now look to other benchmarks.”

Mr Li, who is worth US$28.2 billion according to Bloomberg’s Billionaires Index, started out in business as a plastic flower-maker.

The revamp is also expected to pave the way for Mr Li’s retirement and come amid speculation of a handover to his son Victor.

“We have been negotiating with local villagers for two years to obtain land since we received a permit from the Mandalay Region government,” he said. Myanmar

Mandalay

Tada-U developers stake large-scale project against difficulties raising funds and acquiring land

CONSTRUCTION is now under way at a large project near Mandalay aiming to first service the city’s growing tourism industry.

Developers Myanmar Tourism Development Co were given the green light to start the project in Tada-U township, Mandalay Region in 2012, though construction had not begun because of the time it took to purchase land.

Work has now begun on the 2,400-acre project, which is slated to include a hotel zone along with industrial, residential and park land, according to the firm’s chair U Yan Win.

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

U Hid Hein
Local villager

Tourism Development has now acquired the rights to 2,400 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 tourism sites, such as the historical cities of Inwa, Sagaing and Amarapura.

Development was slated to cost about 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).
Large-scale project attempts to overcome difficulties raising funds and acquiring land to build a major project in Mandalay Region

Tada-U developers start on hotel zone

The Myanmar Times

Local villagers generally told The Myanmar Times they are in favor of the project.

Myint Aung said the faster the firm proceeds to the Ayeyarwady River, said K10 million an acre. I will give 3 to the company at K10 million an acre, he said. I will give 3 to the company at K10 million an acre, he said. If the project can be developed, Myint Aung said the faster the firm proceeds, they are in favor of the project.

In an interview at his Miami office, Mr Perez said he favors a lifting of the embargo even after Cuban exiles 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 should’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 Bahamas, Puerto Rico or Dominican Republic.”

A US President Barack Obama’s move to end a half-century-long embargo on Cuba raises the prospect that American developers and hotel operators such as Marriott International and Hilton Worldwide may be able to enter the tourism-rich market only 90 miles (145 km) from Florida’s coast. They face a long road of navigating a region with unclear property laws and government control, making it probable they will proceed with caution, Mr Perez said. “We demand to take more time because this is a sensitive step.”

Winner postponed for Kyaukphyu

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

NYAN LYNN AUNG

Cuban trade firm booked for hotel zone

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

SAO PAULO

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

Mr Perez, who was born in Argenti- na to Cuban parents, oversees a global com- pany with 128,740 million in assets as chief of Related Group.

The US Agriculture Coalition for Cuba, with more than 25 companies and farm trade associations, was cre- ated January 15 in Washington to urge repeal of a 1996 law that placed permanent sanctions on Cuba after Fidel Castro seized power in 1959.

“We agree to take the compensa- tion money and we welcome the project,” he said. “Actually our land is not good for agriculture and we weren’t turning a consistent profit each year – some years we lost money.”

Others were more reluctant to sell land, however.

U Tin Htin, a farmer who has sold his land to the company, said his land had not been particularly good for farming, adding the project will hopefully improve the area.

“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,” he said.

The 12 competing companies were interviewed by the committee over the past few weeks, with further discus- sions to be held in February. Three of the firms will be chosen to participate in the SEZs first phase, which includes an industrial park, deep sea port and residential area.

We demand to take more time because this is a sensitive step.

U Aung Kyaw Than, Bid Committee

The large SEZ in Rakhine State was announced in September 2013, the third major projects along with Thilawa and Dawei SEZs. A project master plan was revealed by CPG Consultants in June 2014.

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

“We give K10 million in com- pensation 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 of- fered K5 or K7 million an acre, but has upped its offering to attract more villagers to sell their land.

Local villagers generally told The Myanmar Times they are in favor of the project.

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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.

Catherine Trautwein
newsroom@mmtimes.com

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.

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 arm still remains without 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, it’s 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 2Mbps for the moment. Very soon we will introduce 42Mbps. As of now you can enjoy 2-kbps if required, and more than 5Mbps in Yangon suburban areas like Mayangone.

The advantages 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 is also limited.

Why can’t we make the difference 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 land for building new towers?
Yes, not only in Myanmar, but in other countries. 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?
We should be the big problem for the tower-sharing. We are now giving lots of money to improve our towers. We are not getting special benefits from government for building new towers.

In the future, we may share. So in the future, we may share. But other land, they may charge a little much, maybe. [laughs]

How will MPT address CDMA phones?
We have already been discussing with CDMA companies, and we 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 B2B boxes in India?
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.

Are we not signing up [new customers]?
We have to do so. But right now, no. We are waiting for some instructions to be issued by the government.

Will MPT launch more branded shops, as it currently has one?
We have decided Myanmar into 17 regions, and each region will open two branded shops.

In the future, will MPT provide LITE service?
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.

KDDI Summit Global Myanmar (KSSYM) managing director Tatsuki Nagashima, KDDI general manager Khin Myat Tin, and other company officials sat down with a small panel of journalists including The Myanmar Times on January 11 to discuss the challenges and opportunities of MPT’s plans to increase services for millions of Myanmar people while trimming prices to compete. The following conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

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Ooredoo extends 3G network to Mon State

AUNG KYAW NYUNTY

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

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

The firm also plans to start covering Kayahkho Pyu 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 almost total coverage of Myanmar its aim.

“Fighting hate speech with tech

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**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 7500 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 1981.

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.

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 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 netted “immense” 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.

‘The threat in Belgium was to the police forces.’

Didier Reynders
Belgian foreign minister
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, the chief of Charlie Hebdo’s hall of Montreuil, near Paris, during his funeral on January 7.

The arrested man is a 41-year-old man of Turkish origin and is suspected of “leading an Islamist group, Sharia4Belgium, after four years as a former Syria fighter after four years as a former Syria fighter.”

He handed over his weapon to the gunmen, 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 region] 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.

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

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 that 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 5700 structures destroyed — 620 in Baga and 3100 in Doron Baga — destroyed or completely destroyed.

HRW said 11 percent of Baga and 57pc 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 150 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 civilian vigilantes helping the army after they overran a Multinational Joint Task Force base for troops from Nigeria, Niger and Chad who have been involved in operations against them.

Harrowing testimony has been emerging from survivors about the scale and brutality of the assault in Baga, included one woman reportedly killed while in labour.

Witnesses who spoke to AFP described seeing decomposing bodies in the streets and one man who escaped after hiding for three days said he was “stepping on bodies” as he fled through the bush.

Amnesty said on January 15 it had 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 this,” the unnamed witness was quoted as saying.

A man in his thirties 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. It was a mess.”

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said on January 13 that its team in capital of Borno state, Maiduguri, was providing assistance to 5000 survivors of the attack.

The UN refugee agency has said that more than 11,000 Nigerian refugees fled into neighbouring Chad.

Amnesty said the witness accounts and images reinforced fears the attack was Boko Haram’s “targeted and most destructive” in its fight to establish a hardline Islamic state in northeast Nigeria, which has killed over 13,000 people since 2009. – AFP

LAGOS

Boko Haram massacre condemned

A satellite image made available by Human Rights Watch shows evidence of large-scale destruction following a Boko Haram attack. Photo: AFP
CAMBODIAN strongman Hun Sen marked three decades as premier on January 14 hailing 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 backstreet 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.

“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 Loeung, 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 tigers’ 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 Sopheap Chak, executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights in Phnom Penh.

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.

“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).

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“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
Surrogates move to have babies returned

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 accomplished anything very much," he said, speaking slowly but with obvious effort. "My life is of no importance at all.”

Born to an aristocratic family in 1909, Mr Zhou experienced the last years of the Qing dynasty and its revolutionary overthrow, before studying at elite universities in Shanghai and Japan.

When Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China in 1937, Mr Zhou moved with his wife and two children to the central city of Chongqing, where he endured constant air raids but made contacts with leaders in the then comparatively weak Communist party.

After Japan’s defeat he avoided 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," Zhou wrote in a 2012 autobiography.

"When you encounter difficulties you need to be optimistic. The pessimists tend to die." – Zhou Youguang

Inventor of Pinyin

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.

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.

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 Lin, 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.

"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.” – AFP

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**Father of Pinyin still dissenting as he marks his 109th birthday**

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"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.” – AFP
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.

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

“The government has always defended all newspapers and television networks, and many citizens prefer to get their news online from blogs or social media, which contain less propaganda,” said Mr Dung.

But the quality of the blogs and social media postings is uneven. Some discredited-run sites offer unverified reporting on sensitive political topics, other online commentators spread sensational rumours.

Earlier this month, in a rare move, authorities denied widespread sensational rumours. But the seas off Southeast Asia, particularly the waterways between Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, have steadily emerged as a new hot spot, 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.

“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.

“Groups 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.”

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

“We cannot ban it,” he said at the meeting in Hanoi.

Over the last few years, Vietnam has had one of the fastest rates of Facebook uptake in the world, and 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 18 months Facebook has been easily accessible in Vietnam without a VPN or other measures.

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. Some discredited-run sites offer unverified reporting on sensitive political topics, other online commentators spread sensational rumours.

Earlier this month, in a rare move, authorities denied widespread sensational rumours that a popular senior communist party official Nguyen Ba Thanh, a former top official in central Danang City, had been poisoned with radioactive material by a political rival.

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

“In the past, Mr Dung has driven that effort needs to be strengthened and maritime patrols had significantly reduced the problem in recent years.

The IMB has warned recently that effort needs to be strengthened once again.

The region is home to vital shipping lanes such as the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait separating Malaysia and Indonesia, through which one-third of global trade passes.

Waters off Somalia saw just three incidents in 2014, down from 160 in 2011, the IMB said.

The global total of 245 incidents is the lowest since 263 were recorded in 2007.
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 the courtroom, “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.

“Wiese 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 hit in the bathroom during the attack before the couple stuffed the victim’s body in a suitcase. 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

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 there will be no pardons for those convicted of drugs offences on death row, disappointing activists who had hoped the reformist leader would take a softer line on capital punishment.

“The foreigners, from Brazil, Malaysia, Vietnam and Nigeria, will be executed by firing squad on January 15,” said attorney general HM Prasetyo.

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.

“For those who disagree with the death penalty, there is strong public support for putting drug traffickers to death. The Dutch government also condemned Mr Ang’s planned execution.”

“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.

“Today will be 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 offences and there is strong public support for putting drug traffickers to death.” – AFP

‘The defendant, overwhelmed with emotion and anger, swung [the fruit bowl] at her face.’
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Phone: 372416
Dated: 19th January, 2015

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U Kyi Win Associates
for BURLING LIMITED
P.O. Box No. 26, Yangon.
Phone: 372416
Dated: 19th January, 2015

SYDNEY

PNG detaines swallow razor blades

AUSTRALIAN Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said on January 16 he was worried about a “volatile situa- tion” at a Papua New Guinea asylum-seeker camp after reports that de- tainees 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 advocate and reports said.

“I think this is a very serious situ- ation,” Mr Dutton told reporters.

“I am worried 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 situ- ation 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 Corpora- tion said it had video from inside the detention centre showing what appeared to be two men being taken away on stretchers after con- suming washing powder.

Other footage showed asylum- seekers chanting for freedom.

Mr Dutton, who took on the im- migration 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 respect of the rice scheme but the govern- ment ignored it:” Mr Vichai said, adding he hoped the Attorney-General would “agree” to also pursue a criminal charge against her over the scheme.

Earlier this month, Ms Yingluck defended the scheme as a well-inten- tioned attempt to support Thailand’s rural poor, who historically receive a disproportionately small slice of gov- ernment cash.

“I ran the government with honesty and in accordance with all laws,” she told the assembly.

But her failure to attend on Janu- ary 16 sparked sharp criticism from members known for their loathing of the Shinawatra clan, who bitterly divide opinion in Thailand.

“Of all our questions are clearly and directly put to Yingluck, she should come to answer,” said assembly mem- ber and renowned anti-Thaksin figure Somchai Sawangkarn.

The assembly ruled that Ms Yin- gluck would have to answer their ques- tions this week ahead of the vote.

Since Mr Thaksin swept to power in 2001, Shinawatra governments have been floored by two coups and bloodied by the removal of three other premiers by the kingdom’s interventionist courts.

The Shinawatras’ rise has coincided with the declining health of Thailand’s revered 87-year-old King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

“I ask people to listen to the direc- tions that they are being given by the staff and by the officers on the ground, so that we can deal with is- sues peacefully,” he said.

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 pro- vided 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 Decem- ber as “eminently foreseeable” and mostly caused by delays in process- ing refugee claims.

Some 1035 men are held on Manus Island, according to immigra- tion figures ending December 31. No women and children are detained in the facility.

A total of 695 asylum-seekers, 596 men, 164 women and 135 children, are held on Nauru. – AFP
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Class 14
Alarm clocks; buckles of precious metal; chains (watch); chronographs (watches); chronometer; clips (tie); clocks; electric clock and watch; chronometrical instruments; cufflinks; costume jewellery; dials (clocks and watch making); hunting watches; skeleton watches; key rings (trenk or fobs); movement for clocks and watches, shoe ornaments (of precious metal); sport watches; stopwatches; straps for wristwatch; tie pins; watches; wristwatches; its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 14.

Class 16
Office stationery, address books; activity books; bags (envelopes, pouches) of paper or plastics, for packaging; books; comic books; colouring pencils; computer printers (inking ribbons for); cutters (tongue); calendars; cards; catalogues; chalk (marking); exercise books; holder (passport); ink; inking pads; inking ribbons for computer printers; document files (stationery); drawing instruments; drawing materials; drawing pads; erasing products; forms (printed); fountain pens; greeting cards; handbooks (manuals); mechanical pencils; magazines; note books; office requisites except furniture; pads (stationery); pads (writing); paintbrushes; pamphlets; paper; pastels (crayons); pencil holders; pencil leads; pencil sharpeners (electric or non-electric); pencils; pen holders; pens (office requisites); periodicals; postcards; printed matters; printing sets; pictures; posters; rulers; scrap-books; staples for offices; stationery; story books; typewritten ribbons; typewriters; diaries; wrapping papers; water colours; its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 16.

Class 18
Goods made of leather, imitations of leather or combinations thereof: travelling bags, travelling sets, luggage, travelling bags, travelling cases, the class 28.

Class 24
Bed linen, bedroom linens, bed, bed cover, 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 comforters], face towels, hand towels, handkerchiefs of textile, knitted fabric, mattress covers, mattress protectors, napkins and serviettes, pillows, pillow cases, pillow shams, pillow protectors, table clothes, table mats, quilt covers, shower curtain of textile or plastic, quilts, sleeping bags, table and household linen, table cloths, its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 24.

Class 25
Clothing for men, ladies, children and infants: apron (cooking); babies’ diaper of textile; baby 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); cummerbunds; cravats; clothing of imitation leather; clothing of leather; coats; coats (fall); combination (clothing); corsets; corduroy; cardigans; chemise; clogs; dresses; dressing gowns; ear muffls (clothing); footwear; furs (clothing); girdles; gloves (clothing); handkerchiefs; hats; headbands; headgear for wear; hosiery; jackets; jackets (clothing); jeans; jumpers (shirt front); knittwear (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); socks (underwear); socks; sneakers; sport shoes; sport jerseys; slacks; shorts; stockings; suspenders; stockings; suits; sun visors; suspenders; sweaters; swimsuit; t-shirt; t-shirts; tights; trousers; tank tops; underclothes; underwear; underpants; underwear; uniforms; vests; waistbands; wind jackets; its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 25.

Class 28
Sporting articles, instruments and equipment for sports, balls for games; baseball gloves; bats for games; badminton rackets; bicycles (stationary exercise); board games; body building apparatus; card (playing); club (golf); games; golf bags; golf clubs; with or without wheels; golf shoes; golf tees; golf balls; gymnastics (apparel for); hockey sticks; ice skates; knee guard (sport articles); mobiles (toys); nets for sports, ornaments for X’mas trees; plush toys; rackets; roller skates; scooters; toys; women’s fashion; shuffleboard; skateboards; skates (ice); skis; swimming pools (play articles); slides (playthings); table tennis; tennis nets; toys; tennis rackets; machine for physical exercises; sport bags; apparatus for electronic games other than those adapted for use with television, radio, or other broadcast apparatus; its parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods all included in class 28.

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Sex in the city

PHOTO: THAIDOHI
A Thida still fears the madams and the pimps. Now an employee of the World Health Organization, the former prostitute has not forgotten her terrifying experiences at the hands of those who control Myanmar’s sex workers. Ma Thida’s work takes her out into the streets, and to the houses of ill repute, to advise on how to avoid HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, and to hand out condoms. Sometimes she persuades a woman to come for a blood test. But the hardest job is getting around the “head of the house.”

“Pimps and madams never want us to meet with the girls, even though the girls want to meet with us. They will dock a girl’s wages for talking to us,” said Ma Thida.

It’s the head of the house who sets the working conditions and the rules, including how many times each night a sex worker will have to submit to clients.

“Five sessions a night doesn’t mean just having sex with five men. Sometimes a session can mean having sex with two or three men. Sometimes you get so tired that you can’t complete five sessions in a day, and your salary is docked,” Ma Thida said.

Not meeting the quota also means being confined to the house until you have finished your work the next day.

“‘If you want to go out to visit your family or your boyfriend, you have to accept every client even if you are tired or they don’t have a condom,’” she said.

When a girl is arrested or has to appear in court, the head of the house will deal with the police and pay the fine. But then they charge the girls double, said Ma Thida.

“The girls are afraid of them and have nowhere to turn, so they just keep working until their contract is finished and repay the heads with interest any loans they’ve received,” she said.

But former sex worker Ma Khin Wine, 38, disagreed. The girls know all about their terms of employment before they take the job, and are considerate heads of house would make sure customers were evenly distributed among the girls to ensure that each had a steady income.

Ma Thida’s work is distributed among the girls to ensure that each had a steady income. Sometimes you get so tired that you can’t complete five sessions in a day, and your salary is docked,” Ma Thida said.

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But former sex worker Ma Khin Wine, 38, disagreed. The girls know all about their terms of employment before they take the job, and receive support from the heads of houses, she said.

Ma Khin Wine, who worked in the sex trade for over 12 years and now sells vegetables for a living, said the head of the house in Ayeyarwady Region where she used to work was fair to her and the other girls in the house.

“He would take K5000 per session, but if we earned K10,000 or K15,000, that extra money was ours to keep,” she said, adding that a considerate head of house would make sure customers were evenly distributed among the girls to ensure that each had a steady income.

However, Ma Khin Wine witnessed that she hated the brokers who deal in young girls. She was sold to a house when she was in her 20s by a pimp who took a cut of her earnings until her “debt” was paid.

“They take advantage of girls like me who want to be beautiful and to spend more than we earn, and they would sell us to a house. Even once we’d paid back the debt, we were stuck doing sex work because that was all we knew,” she said. Brokers are often well known in their neighbourhoods, and know all the girls who might be susceptible to such an approach, she said.

For another sex worker, Ma Hnin Si, the crooks are neither the heads of houses nor the pimps, but the police.

“They know who we are and what we do. Sometimes we have to give them money. Mostly, we try to stay away from them,” said Ma Hnin Si, who said she tried to memorise the officers’ faces in case they approach her in plain clothes.

“They can arrest us even in our personal time when we’re not working. They force us to confess by threatening a longer jail sentence – three years instead of one. ‘We have no idea what the judge is saying, but we know everyone in court is looking down on us for what we are,’” said Ma Hnin Si.

And policemen in uniform can be just as bad – because some of them are not even policemen. Uniformed tricksters sometimes demand money and gold from the girls, beat them and use them for sex, then disappear.

“When my friends found out that ‘officers’ who were harassing them were fake, the men robbed and beat them. How can we go to the real police, when they would arrest us for prostitution?” said Ma Hnin Si.

In Myanmar, the police can arrest a woman for carrying a condom in her handbag if it is taken as evidence of prostitution.

Ma Zar Chi now works for an NGO-run clinic, but still finds herself being targeted by police.

“One day I had to go to the Ayeyarwady Delta. At Hlaing Tharyar bus station, the police were checking bags and found condoms in mine,” she said. “They took me to the station for questioning. I told them I was distributing condoms to help prevent HIV. They accused me of being a prostitute.” Though she escaped a charge by telling the police she used condoms with her husband because she is HIV-positive, Ma Zar Chi said most sex workers avoid using condoms because customers prefer it that way.

“Clients who are drunk and who know nothing about HIV refuse to wear a condom. Since we are afraid to carry them, we have to do without,” said sex worker Ma Thiri, adding that many working girls are reluctant even to buy condoms because vice squad officers keep the shops under surveillance.

And at for publishing their plight, sex workers are wary of journalists. Though some believe reporters campaigning with NGOs on HIV-related matters want to do the right thing, stories that accurately identify sex workers and their places of employment tend to be followed up by police raids – and not because the police want to track down the men who beat them.

“Some articles even identify the street or the bus-stop where we work, even if we don’t want to be arrested, we have to give up work for a couple of days after the story comes out.”

Names have been changed to protect identities.
Prodigy revives the ancient art of puppetry

ZON PANN PWINT
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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 practiced puppetry before that day,” he 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 sailor's pulse. When he discovered his son's talent, he was so amazed that, until recently, his father said, “I didn’t believe he would have the courage to perform in front of audiences because he is a shy boy. But I granted him his wish. His first performance went well and the audiences were impressed by his talent.”

In Myanmar, there are traditionally 28 human and animal characters in a puppet troupe, including the ogre, alchemist, king, prince, princess, master, hermit, tiger, parrot, monkey and pageboy. The performance is accompanied by a traditional music band or presenters who satire, sing and talk but do not appear.

Over time, the number of characters has been reduced to as few as six, and most shows no longer include a live band or presenters due to cost and space. Instead, troupes use recordings and a single narrator.

U Khin Maung Htwe’s troupe 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 son’s 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 paving the way for young people with talent,” U Khin Maung Htwe said. “But 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 audience 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 I was just playing. But you’re young enough to learn to use the tools. When he grows, I will let him learn puppet making,” he said.
Exhibition captures Yangon’s vibrant past

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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 Rudyard 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.

The exhibition showcases over 120 photographs reflecting on Yangon’s cosmopolitan past and present. Photo: Charlotte Rose

New York exhibition to show Myanmar Buddhist art for first time

NANDAR AUNG
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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 organisation 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

Burmese beauty contestants pose in 1949. Photo: Supplied

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 1950. 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.
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.

A bird’s-eye view of Bagan

YU YU doublewayne.jan@gmail.com

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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 important as it enables you to make positive changes.

PISCES | 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 and be sure to devote enough time to business and friendships successfully, also be beneficial.

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 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 diplomatic 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 enemies when you should be looking for allies. 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 been escalating.

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.

AURYN MYIN KYAW
4th Floor, 173, Thamaun Bayan Road, Tamwe township, Yangon. Tel: 09-731-59332, Email: williamnaa@gmail.com
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 “fusion” 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 at 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.

**FENNEL BUTTER**

Transfer the mushrooms onto a plate and set aside. Keep in a warm serving to prevent it from oxidising.

**APPLE AND FENNEL SALAD**

The only thing I love more than quantity variation.

**New opening fails to raise the steaks**

The newest addition to Yangon’s restaurant scene is Tony Roma’s, which we’ve welcomed across America for its so-called “legendary” ribs and mammoth portion sizes. As someone who has called “legendary” ribs and mammoth portion sizes nonexistent, 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 — as 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.

**Restaurant Review**

**CHARLOTTE ROSE**
charlotte.rose@msn.com

** restaurateur to put the straight thing to your vegetarian friend. Amongst the few pork and beef ribs, feral medallions and ribs eye steak. The mashed potatoes are topped with bacon. Ribs are available for messy eaters, but if you aren’t a fan of the cow-man meal, there is also a range of seafood and pasta options on the menu. 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” (K500) — composed of tequila and acai extract — while my guest opted for a “Cadillac: Top-Shelf” (K5000). 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.

- 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.

- Lay the fish fillets on some kitchen paper and season with a pinch 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. Cut the mushrooms lengthways into similarly sized pieces. 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.

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Guests celebrated the official opening of the Yangon branch of Bolgogi Brothers Korean BBQ restaurant on January 9.

Guests celebrated the opening of the Yangon branch of restaurant chain Tony Roma’s in Golden Valley on January 11.

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 Sandi Myint Lwin.
www.mmtimes.com

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.

UTMA
Guests attended the UTMA dinner at White Rice on January 10.

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**Domestic Airlines**

**Air Bagan (W9)**
- Tel: 383100, 383107, 700264
- Fax: 65233, 516456

**Asian Wings (YJ)**
- Tel: 09400446999, 09400447999
- Fax: 69532

**FMI Air Charter**
- Tel: 383100, 383107, 700264
- Fax: 65233, 516456

**Golden Myanmar Airlines (YS)**
- Fax: 69532

**Mann Yadanarpon Airlines (7Y)**
- Tel: 65649
- Fax: 65649, 65120

**Yangon Airways (YJ)**
- Fax: 383100, 383107, 700264
- Fax: 65233

**Air Lines**

**7Y = Mann Yadanarpon Airlines**
**FMI = FMI Air Charter**
**K7 = Air KBZ**
**W9 = Air Bagan**
**YS = Golden Myanmar Airlines**
**YJ = Yangon Airways**
**YJ = Asian Wings**

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Heartbeat of the Nation
Exploring Myanmar’s far south by road

W
It had never pictured ourselves ripping through the streets of a pirate stronghold in a side-car, trying to outrun a procession of dancing innocents. But that’s exactly where I and my friends found ourselves on the last day of our extraordinary road trip south of Yangon.

We were squashed, the eight of us, into a metal estate bolted to the side of a motorbike. Said vehicle – which appeared to be stuck on a top speed of “slow” – had already broken down once before as it tried to haul our combined holiday weight up a minor incline.

It was our final night in Myek, Tanintharyi Region, after 30 days on the road. In a mini-van hired from Yangon (US$1080 from Yangon to Dawei), our original company of nine had set off on an ambitious 924-kilometre (574 mile) road journey via Hpa-an, Mawlamyine, Yw, Dawei, Maungmagan and then Myek, after which we planned to fly back to Yangon.

Whispers of the road to Myanmar’s southern coast were beginning to reach foreign ears. Locals had started linking road and air transport. By 2016, a deep seaport and industrial economic zone is earmarked to be completed.

One of the most striking aspects of the Taninthary Region is its landscape. 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 attract tourists in droves. It’s a rare sight, and the solitude of vast stretches of sand and open water are a relief after the congested humidity of Yangon.

From Dawei, we hired another minivan (K200,000) to take us on yet another hot and lurching journey down to the former pirate enclave of Myek.

Closer to Bangkok than it is to Yangon, Myek is a delightful colonial town full of cute little winding streets and charming cafes, where I expected to practise my English or Thai. In fact, during our entire trip across the Southeast region, we found so many people spoke Thai that my Myanmar language skills were pretty much redundant.

There is still so much to be explored in the remote regions of Myanmar. Inland we found a new appreciation for the region.

Absolutely. Don’t be deterred by stories about bandits or recent skirmishes between armed forces in the region, but be aware of what is happening in more remote areas. And when you’ve finished the trip, the plane ride back home offers a bird’s-eye view of the places you’ve visited along the coastline.

Getting there: Cars and mini-vans can be hired from Kyauk Phyu Car Rental in Yangon (www. kyaukphyuarental.com). If you’re not up to driving, both Dawei and Myek are served by airports, with daily flights departing from Yangon.

Where to stay: Coconut Resort in Maungmagan, about 15 minutes’ drive south of Dawei, is a locally run guesthouse offering pleasant bungalows that sleep up to five. The Eain Taw Phyu hotel in Myek has a range of modern deluxe and super- roomiers with excellent facilities.

YANGON TO BANGKOK

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DONG MUEANG TO YANGON

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YANGON TO SINGAPORE

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Subject to change without notice
Universal Crossword

Edited by Timothy E. Parker

TRUE BEGINNERS by Lester J. White

ACROSS
1 Lovable dog
2 Bit of a pencil
3 “Beetle Bailey” dog
4 Courageous
5 Parts of coastal towns
6 appliance do it
7 Computer owners
8 It may be fit for a queen
10 Much of a stir
11 Her’s posting
12 Literally, “in another place”
13 Make a new knot in
14 Shop shaper
15 Lifestyle of the rich and famous, perhaps
16 Ford’s running mate
17 Aquatic animal
18 Gave a pink slip to
19 Death notice, for short
20 Abbott and Costello’s baseball classic
21 Deere implement
22 Road paving goo
23 Bash for M. Butterfly
24 Wedding cake feature
25 Marker brand
26 Change in Roma, once
27 Play... (kiddie clay)
28 Penny
29 Dexterous
30 Penny
31 Aussie marsupial
32 Great Lakes city
33 Sash for M. Butterfly
34 Leaded Chinese dynasty
35 Formal negative
36 Fly in the ointment
37 11,000-foot Italian peak
38 Airplanes do it
39 Leaves
41 Indicated a turn
42 Drug shipment, sometimes
43 Broadway’s “Sweeney...”
44 Emerald, for one
45 Irish dramatist John Millington...
46 Noted Chinese dynasty
48 Path-talking
49 Musicians’ sweet potato
50 Leaders of the mongrel hordes?
51 Beta Kappa
52 “K” of JFK, e.g.
54 Change in Roma, once
55 Everybody’s opposite
56 Brain’s creation
57 B’y of JFK, e.g.
58 Far from a sure thing
59 Infinitesimal amount
60 Abbreviated mystery writer?
61 “Borrow” antonym
62 Beach sweeper
63 Everybody’s opposite
64 Change in Roma, once
65 Everybody’s opposite
66 Brain’s creation
67 Famous garden
68 Mounted, as a horse
69 Penny
70 Detergent
71 Antelope with spiral horns

DOWN
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4 Storage container
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1 post in Mrauk-U:
1 post in Maubin:
1 post in Mayanmar:
1 post in Dawei:
1 post in about 290 USD per month, 2 days work shift duty, 2 nights stay at hotel, then 2 days rest at home. Age 35 - 45, 10 years experience, 7 years in Marketing/SALES, fluent in English.

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US pair relish historic Yosemite free climb

The El Capitan rock formation. Photo: AFP

Fourth National Sport Festival date postponed until mid-February

TO the surprise of the event organizers, the Ministry of Sport announced last week that the fourth national sports festival will be postponed until mid-February.

“We don’t know why the government instructed us to put off the festival,” said U Htay Aung, director of the Mass Sport and Education section in the Ministry of Sports. "We think that they instructed us to postpone the date of the festival because it is conflicted with other projects they have planned to do in January.

While he and his staff hope to begin the tournament on February 13, U Htay Aung said his superiors at the Ministry of Sport have not yet approved the proposed date.

“We will inform State and Region governments about the date when the approval is granted,” he said.

There is likely to have an effect on the number of athletes who will choose to compete, as many state and regional sports clubs stopped training in early January in anticipation of starting on the original date, according to U Htay Aung.

Delays have become a standard feature of the National Sport Festival, which was first held in 1992. The second and third festivals were held in 1994 and 1997, and then the whole event was put on hold due to a lack of budget.

The 2015 festival was meant to be a triumphant return that would hopefully see the tournament become an annual tradition.

According to organizers, the fourth National Sport Festival will include:

- Basketball
- Volleyball
- Weightlifting
- Traditional boxing
- Table tennis
- Cane ball
- Cycling
- Football
- Futsal (male/female)
- Golf
- Judo
- Karate
- Traditional boat race
- Sepak takraw
- Swimming/diving
- Traditional boxing
- Table tennis
- Taekwondo
- Tennis
- Marathon
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- Athletics

The festival will be postponed until mid-February.
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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 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 show that it can successfully host a World Cup, but also to begin to reverse the negative press which has surrounded its sporting ambitions, especially in the West, said Simon Chadwick, professor of sports business strategy at Coventry University.

"The established perception needs to be changed and reversed," he told AFP. "What Qatar needs is tangible proof that its strategy of investing in sport events is working."

The handball provides an opportunity for people to "get to know Qatar and see how it 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."

Beyond the very modern structure lies desert. But in a few years' time the stadium, which holds more than 15,000 fans, will be just one tiny part of a gigantic urban development.

The scale of the project, even in a country where building works take place 24 hours a day, is unmatched.

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 a litmus test for Qatar's sporting ambitions.

A report last November in British daily The Guardian said forced workers making last-minute preparations for the start of the tournament.

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 to build the stadium where the final will be played.

"Such events as the handball are important for Qatar to demonstrate it can manage high-profile events," he said. – AFP

3rd Yangon Marathon

Clocking in at 2 hours, 22 minutes and 46 seconds, Kenyan runner Joseph Gilu Karuki (pictured below) won his third consecutive Yangon Marathon's 42-kilometre male event last week.

Fellow Kenyan Mary Wangai Kiguru won the female event, with local runner Myint Myint Aye coming in second.

In the 21 km half marathon, local favorites Ku Nyi Nyi Aung and Nway Nadi Soe placed third in their respective events.

Altogether around 4100 runners from all over the world were competed in the day's races.

– Kyaw Zin Hlaing

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