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Heartbeat of The Nation

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A resident facing eviction for the development of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone speaks to Yangon Region Minister for Agriculture and Livestock Breeding U Soe Min during a meeting in Kyauktan township on February 14. Pic: Ko Taik

Lawyers' Network urges govt to act over crackdown

Officials who ordered dispersal of protesters should face legal action over excessive use of force

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

OFFICIALS who ordered the use of banned weapons against unarmed protesters should be prosecuted, a group of Myanmar lawyers has said.

Releasing their report on the violent police crackdown against protesters over the Letpadaung copper mine dispute last November, Lawyers' Network (Myanmar) and the Justice Trust said more than 100 protesters, including monks, suffered deep chemical burns from the white phosphorous grenades used to disperse them.

Now the group is calling on President U Thein Sein to order an investigation into the incident.

The allegations and demands were made at a press conference at Royal Rose Restaurant on February 14 that was attended by members of the Lawyers' Network, Letpadaung residents, activists and Mr Roger Normand, director of

the Justice Trust.

The 40-page report they published states that "police deployed military-issue white phosphorous incendiary smoke grenades to disperse peaceful protesters, setting fire to their camps and causing many injuries. White phosphorous spontaneously ignites in air to produce burning phosphorous pentoxide particles and, when combined with water, superheated phosphoric acid.

"The police action set ablaze and destroyed six protest camps housing up to 500 monks and 50 farmers. Detonators were exposed to a burning rain of pentoxide and hit by flaming globes of phosphoric acid. Well over 100 protesters suffered deep chemical burns."

Mr Normand said: "It is unheard of for police to use incendiary military munitions against peaceful protesters during a law enforcement operation. This raises questions of senior-level command responsibility

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Thilawa residents win temporary reprieve

By Noe Noe Aung

RESIDENTS living in a proposed special economic zone at Thilawa have been told they can stay in their homes until a decision is made on compensation and relocation.

As *The Myanmar Times* reported last week, hundreds of households in Thanlyin and Kyauktan townships had been told to leave their homes by February 14 or face 30 days imprisonment. Many said they would stay in their homes despite the threat of imprisonment as they had nowhere else to go.

But at a meeting with residents on February 14, Yangon Region Minister for Agriculture and Livestock

Breeding U Soe Min said officials were looking for a solution that minimises the impact on the residents.

"This meeting is for the farmers and villagers. We are here just to ask their difficulties. We will consider everything they say and will make a plan that so the villagers and farmers here won't get hurt," he said at the meeting in Kyauktan township.

"We will make a decision according to the new farmland law of 2012 and it will be the least harmful decision for farmers and villagers," he added.

Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development U Set Aung said at the meeting that the zone will bring more job opportunities for residents in the area.

"By the time the Thilawa Special

Economic Zone is implemented, there will be many factories – large factories. All factories will need many employees. There will be many job opportunities for residents, farmers and their descendents. We would like to explain the advantages [and] we want the residents to cooperate with us," he said.

But farmer U Mya Hlaing from Alwan Sut village said based on previous experience the prospect of factory jobs did not give him much hope.

"Almost every elder people in the villages are not educated. We barely have primary education. Many of our children and grandchildren cannot

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Najib hits the campaign trail

XXVII SEA Games: missing the point



ALTHOUGH it should be a cinch to guess the name of the politician who did the following things, several perceptive observers were flummoxed when tested over the weekend.

The politician in question visited the Hamas-controlled Palestinian enclave of Gaza last month, and then went to Davos, Switzerland, to attend the World Economic Forum.

There, he told investors that the threat of Islamic militancy in Southeast Asia had been nullified; yet upon returning home, he promptly had three alleged terrorists detained for subversive activities.

Soon afterwards, he was mortified to hear that Singapore's long-ruling People's Action Party (PAP) had lost a by-election in a former safe seat after an anti-government swing of 13.5 percent.

On February 11 he attended a vote-getting Chinese New Year bash where South Korean superstar Psy will perform his famous Gangnam Style dance.

No, it's not Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, whose party does face elections soon and who did visit Egypt and Saudi Arabia last week. He attended Davos in 2011, but not this year.

Nor is it Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, who, while facing elections in July, fears no PAP-type reversal and hence has no need to woo minority voters, nor is he likely ever to be invited to Davos.

No, it is Malaysia's rather vulnerable Prime Minister Najib Razak, who must hold a general election by June 27, and who, as the above actions indicate, is now in full campaign mode.

His trip to Gaza, the first by a non-Arab Muslim



Malaysia Prime Minister Najib Razak meets people in Penang on February 11. Pic: AFP

leader since 2007, was provocative, dangerous, crudely geared to impress his Malay-Muslim constituents – and highly laudable.

After all, the Hamas-led government in Gaza has been in power since it was democratically elected in 2006 and has more legitimacy than some countries in the region.

Predictably, the rival Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank condemned Najib's visit, as did Western nations that noticed it; less predictably, Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim did the same.

Anwar is a rather mercurial fellow. In his younger days, he was a fervent Islamist with revolutionary tendencies. Today, his attitudes, especially his foreign policy, align more with those of the United States.

It is understandable. During his long years of detention and subsequent harassment by former PM Mahathir Mohamad's

authoritarian government, no one supported Anwar as much as the US.

But his echo of Washington's censure of Najib's visit to Gaza could be a major misstep.

Najib has cannily defended it as a humanitarian mission and took the opportunity to chastise Israeli belligerence and to offer scholarships to needy Palestinian students.

For a notoriously indecisive politician, it was a bold move that might, on its own, help Najib's National Front government retain Malay heartland states like Kedah, Perak and Terengganu.

What it will not do is win over non-Malay votes.

Recent soundings are ominous for Najib for they indicate that both the Chinese and Indian communities will support the Anwar-led opposition.

The PM's National Front can live with this in peninsular Malaysia where a large majority of the population is Muslim, but if it occurs in the East

Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, then Najib will be toast.

And it could happen, for his overtures to East Malaysians have been hurt by last month's revelations of a "citizenship-for-votes" scheme whereby hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants were given identity cards.

Last month, a commission of inquiry was told by one former official that he accepted over US\$25,000 to grant citizenship to illegal Filipino, Indonesian and Pakistani Muslims who promised to vote for the National Front.

The numbers certainly support the allegation. In 1960, less than 40pc of Sabah's population was Muslim; today, it is nearly 70pc.

How native-born Malaysians react to this vast fraud in the coming election is hard to gauge, but it is possible that the shock results in Singapore will pale beside what happens soon in Malaysia.

By Aung Zin Phyto Thein

MYANMAR has become the darling the global community. Where change in other countries has come about through bloodshed, it managed the tricky achievement of a "peaceful transition". A few years ago, the idea of an American president, let alone a Western dignitary, visiting Myanmar was madness but in November President Barack Obama made a brief but historic stopover on his way to the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh.

But many overlook that the government is still struggling to shake off the reins of socialist and later military rule, which both enslaved the country and her people into poverty, paranoia and isolation.

However, old philosophies should not always be frowned upon. Many, particularly economic policies, have brought about disaster but a select few have shaped the virtues of the nation.

I am not a fan of socialist ideology, as I consider it to be an unachievable concept. But a number of the values endorsed by socialism are indeed worthy of clinging on to, such as its mentality in competition.

This can be seen no clearer than in Myanmar's preparations for the 27th SEA Games, which the country will be hosting in December. There is less than a year left but organisers are still correcting embarrassing spelling mistakes on billboards where "Kambodia" and "Philippine" had been printed. But spelling mistakes are the least of our worries in preparing for the games.

The most glaring aspect is its very intention for hosting the games, which Myanmar has hosted twice before, in 1961 and 1969.

Myanmar has long been a sporting powerhouse in Southeast Asia. At one time, Myanmar athletes

were vying for top honours against the world's best. They were both feared and respected for their work ethic, patriotism and, most importantly, sportsmanship.

Where are those virtues now? In the dual language *New Light of Myanmar*, the phrase, "In order to achieve glory in the upcoming XXVII SEA Games," can be seen too often. Glory is not what hosting the SEA Games should be about. The sports exhibited should reflect this. Despite much regional outrage, traditional chess was added by the Ministry of Sport to "maximise medal accumulation".

Myanmar finished as champion at both the 1961 and 1969 games. Little was mentioned of the search for glory – the only thing that was urged was for the nation to unite in search of national pride. Glory and national pride are worlds apart: looking for the latter is not a quest for medals, but a quest for international recognition, to display a "We can do it!" spirit.

Brunei and Laos have set an example in this regard. In 1997, host Brunei finished third last on the medal table; Laos' standing in Vientiane in 2009 was the same. But what they managed to do was to bring the nation together and host the games fairly.

A long, hard road lies ahead for the new Myanmar. But in order not to slip at the very first step, the ideology of hosting the SEA Games should be thoroughly altered in order for national pride to reign above all else, including winning medals.

The SEA Games were created with the purpose of uniting the people of South East Asia into one community. We are proud to tell everybody our country is changing. Our main aim should be to show the world that Myanmar can unite, rather than divide, ASEAN through its hosting of the SEA Games in December.

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UN human rights envoy Tomas Quintana (left) talks with Rakhine refugees in Sittwe on February 12. Pic: EPA

Communities in Rakhine still 'angry', says envoy

By Zaw Win Than

ALTHOUGH violence may have abated in the Rakhine conflict, anger between the two communities still persists, UN human rights envoy Tomas Quintana told *The Myanmar Times* following his visit to the state.

Mr Quintana, who is visiting Myanmar to gather information for a report to the UN Human Rights Committee next month, travelled to Sittwe, Rakhine State, on February 12 to assess the situation in IDP camps.

"I visited a number of camps in both the Muslim and Rakhine communities. I also visited the prison in Sittwe, where I interviewed Dr Tun Aung, and Rakhine prisoners arrested in connection with the conflict," said Mr Quintana, who added that some camps were not prepared for the coming rainy season.

"In terms of violence the situation has changed, but the sentiment against each of the communities in Rakhine is still very serious. The most important problem is the anger between these communities. They have a common interest in living together, but that could take a long time. That is the challenge," said Mr Quintana, who has visited Myanmar seven times.

The envoy also engaged

Rakhine and Muslim leaders in what he described as a "very difficult" meeting. "At least it was a starting point. The next step is to find common ground between the two communities. That will take time. How much time is up to the Rakhine people, the Muslim community, and Myanmar citizens as a whole," he said.

An independent expert designated by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Myanmar, Mr Quintana said the purpose of his February 11-16 visit was to collect first-hand information in the field in Kachin and Rakhine states for a report to the Human Rights Council.

"In general I am preparing a report for the Human Rights Council to be presented in March," he said.

"We are concerned about the situation of civilians in Kachin State, who are the victims of armed conflict, displacement and land mines, as well as suffering the problems of forced labour and child soldiers."

Mr Quintana visited Nay Pyi Taw on February 14 and Kachin State on February 15. He was scheduled to meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, government officials, and members of parliament, the judiciary, the National Human Rights Commission, and civil society organisations in Nay Pyi Taw and Yangon during the six-day visit.

Quintana visits 'Myanmar Times'

By Nan Tin Htwe

UNITED Nations special rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar Tomas Quintana last week paid a surprise visit to what he called "one of the most important media in the country": *The Myanmar Times*.

The human rights envoy was in Myanmar on a six-day trip that ended on February 16 to gather information for a report on the conflict in Rakhine State to be discussed at next month's meeting of the Human Rights Committee.

"This is an important period in Myanmar's transition to democracy. In this process, the media play a critical role. That's why I wanted to see one of the most important media here," he said during his February 13 visit to *The Myanmar Times*.

Mr Quintana met the paper's co-founder and managing director, Mr Ross Dunkley, for about an hour and then chatted with reporters and other staff.

Mr Dunkley said: "*The Myanmar Times* has been in the news quite a lot recently and I guess it has come onto his radar screen. No doubt his advisers have briefed him on our rather turbulent history. He expressed interest in visiting us and I immediately issued an invitation to his delegation."

Mr Quintana was the first senior UN official to visit the newspaper in 13 years of publishing, Mr Dunkley said. "Doors have been opened and new



UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar Tomas Quintana (right) speaks with Ross Dunkley, the founder and managing director of Myanmar Consolidated Media, which publishes 'The Myanmar Times'. Pic: Ko Taik

avenues created because of his visit, and we will now follow through. For that I thank him," Mr Dunkley said.

Reporters were delighted with the unexpected visit. Ma Myat May Zin, business reporter at *The Myanmar Times*, said she was surprised and proud.

"I went straight onto Facebook and Twitter to report his visit," she said.

Mr Quintana also met other media figures during his visit. On February 12, he held discussions with U Ko Ko,

president of the Myanmar Journalists' Association, U Thiha Saw of the Myanmar Press Council, U Sein Win, editor-in-chief of *Mizzima*, and Daw Khin Soe Win of *Voice of America* at the UN compound on Natmauk Road.

"That was the first time he met with media personnel exclusively. He asked us about the situation of press laws, the Press Council and the current degree of press freedom," U Thiha Saw said.

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Ministry to evict Myanmar Makro from Thaketa factory

By Myat Nyein Aye



The Myanmar Makro Industry factory in Thaketa. Pic: Ko Taik

THE Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries plans to evict tenants of a Thaketa township factory to resolve a privatisation dispute.

The factory was privatised in early 2011 but the tenant refused to leave because it said it had a contract with Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) valid until 2017.

Mega Marine director Daw May Aye Mon paid a total of K3.3625 billion (about US\$4 million) for the 4.7-acre plot. Frustrated at the inability of the Privatisation Commission and MIC to negotiate a resolution, a Mega Marine official last month threatened to "let the world know about the irresponsible government officials". He also questioned whether the government would treat a foreign investor the same as it had Mega Marine.

Dr Pyae Sone, general manager

of the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries' Livestock Feedstuff and Milk Products Enterprise, said at a press conference on February 14 that the ministry would attempt to expel the current tenants, Myanmar Makro Industry, under section 3(i) of the Government Building Eviction Act of 1955.

"Daw May Aye Mon bought the Thaketa Can Factory with

the highest bid ... and she paid entirely on January 30, 2012. Although we sent frequent notice letters, Myanmar Makro did not move out of the factory yet," he said. "We have to remove this [tenant] in accordance with the Government Building Eviction Act of 1955 when we receive authority from the Ministry of Construction."

Dr Pyae Sone said the enterprise sent a list of its factories to be privatised to the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries in 2008, proposing that the Thaketa Can Factory, Thaketa Dried Fish Factory and Dike-Oo Bacon Finished Product Factory be sold off. They then discussed the auction with the current operators.

"The companies that operated the factories in Thaketa did not object to the proposal to privatise the factories," he said, adding that they had indicated they would buy them in the auction.

However, Daw Swe Swe Nyunt, an adviser to Myanmar Makro, said the company would file a civil suit against the ministry.

"The ministry has instructed us to move within 15 days and they will expel us if we will not move. But we need to consider our staff when we move the factory. It's not fair ... so we will file a civil lawsuit against the ministry's legal action," she said.

From page 1

Thilawa residents

finish school and there are only a few graduates. I know the factories will need many employees but at best we will be lower-level workers, such as security guards or nightwatchmen. This is what happened to us in the past," U Mya Hlaing said.

When the Ministry of Industry 1 took land in the Thanlyin area to build factories in 1983-84, many villagers applied for jobs but the factories stipulated that employees must have completed secondary education so locals missed out, he said.

"I am 67 and I am running my farm until now. I am able to care for my family with the earnings from my farm, even though they are not very much. But I'm not sure that I could support them with the work from factory," U Mya Hlaing said.

This fear was regularly raised in the meting, with numerous residents and farmers from the villages in Thanlyin and Kyauktan asking for a "secure" plan for their future.

"We know that we can't fight against the government plan. But this time, we want a commitment from the authorities about our future," said Ko Myo Zaw Oo, a farmer from Alwan Sut village.

Most of the land in question has been taken over the past 30 years by the military and government ministries for little or no compensation. However, the original owners continued to farm the land under a contract farming system.

U Soe Min said officials from the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development, which regularly acquires farmland for industrial projects, had told him the land was taken with "fair" compensation. Farmers should have left at that time but out of "sympathy" the government gave permission for them to squat on the land

and engage in contract farming until the projects were ready to be implemented.

The minister's words did little to satisfy the residents at the meeting - especially his reference to "squattling".

"I don't understand why the officials used the word 'squatters' to us repeatedly. They took the farmland by force and we had to take the compensation without having a chance to complain," Ko Myo Zaw Oo told *The Myanmar Times*.

"It was really painful to hear the word 'squatters'. My ancestors worked so hard to clear the land so that it could be farmed. They thought they owned the land and they lived here and so do we. The reason we lost our farmland was officials took it by force. If we are squatters, why do we still have to pay tax?" said Ko Aye Htay from Thida Myaing ward in Kyauktan township.

"I know we had to move eventually. But I want the officials to consider the livelihoods of the residents."

There also appeared to be some dissent within the bureaucracy over the minister's pledge to review the eviction.

A man that the minister described as a Yangon Region Southern District "law official", but who refused to give his identity, said officials are just trying to remove the squatters from the land.

"The government gives farmers just permission for farming, not the ownership of the farmland. Officials don't take the land and they are trying to remove the squatters' buildings on the land that is owned by government. If you are not squatters, you can show us the proof of some ownership," he told the residents at the meeting.

"None of the residents obeyed the law. For example, the deadline to move out from the land is yesterday [February 13] but no one moved out. This is defying the law. But

officials didn't do anything to the residents and they didn't send them to prison because of sympathy. Residents can't ask for fair [compensation] under the law without obeying the law."

But U Set Aung said he wanted the problem to be solved fairly.

"Based on the facts and data at the government office, there won't be much chance for residents [to receive compensation]. But we will take care not to implement this economic zone by stepping on their lives," he said.

Daw Myint Myint Kyi, a teacher from Baya Gone village, one of three villages where residents have been told to leave, said the eviction should be postponed until after the matriculation exams finish in March.

"If the government is really considering the future of its citizens as they say, they need to solve this dispute carefully and they should suspend eviction until after the exams end," she said. "We have students in the village and they can't study well because of this news, even though they have to sit their matriculation exams next month."

Lawyers' Network

for resulting crimes and the violation of people's constitutional and human rights."

Mr Normand added that the use of these weapons against non-combatants was banned by international law.

The release of the report is the latest development in the conflict between the Wanbao Mining, a Chinese company that runs the copper mine and is funding a massive expansion of the project, and local villagers.

Wanbao has operated the mine, in Salingyi township, Sagaing Region, since 2010 in cooperation with the military-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Company (UMEHL).

Conflicts have arisen between the company and local villagers over issues such as land acquisition, farmland compensation, environmental degradation and health problems. Escalating tensions culminated in the November 29 attack by police on protesters, which prompted President U Thein Sein to establish a commission of investigation headed by Daw Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The commission was due to report by January 31, but has only sent an interim report that was not made public.

Lepadaung residents and activists say they will continue to fight to close the project down.

Mr Normand urged lawyers and the media to ask: "How did the police get these weapons? Who ordered their use against the protesters?"

The report is based on an analysis of evidence collected at the scene, including exploded grenade canisters, as well as witness testimonies, interviews in hospital with injured protestors, and legal documents.

"President U Thein Sein is responsible for ensuring an independent investigation of facts and effective prosecution of wrong-doers," the report added.

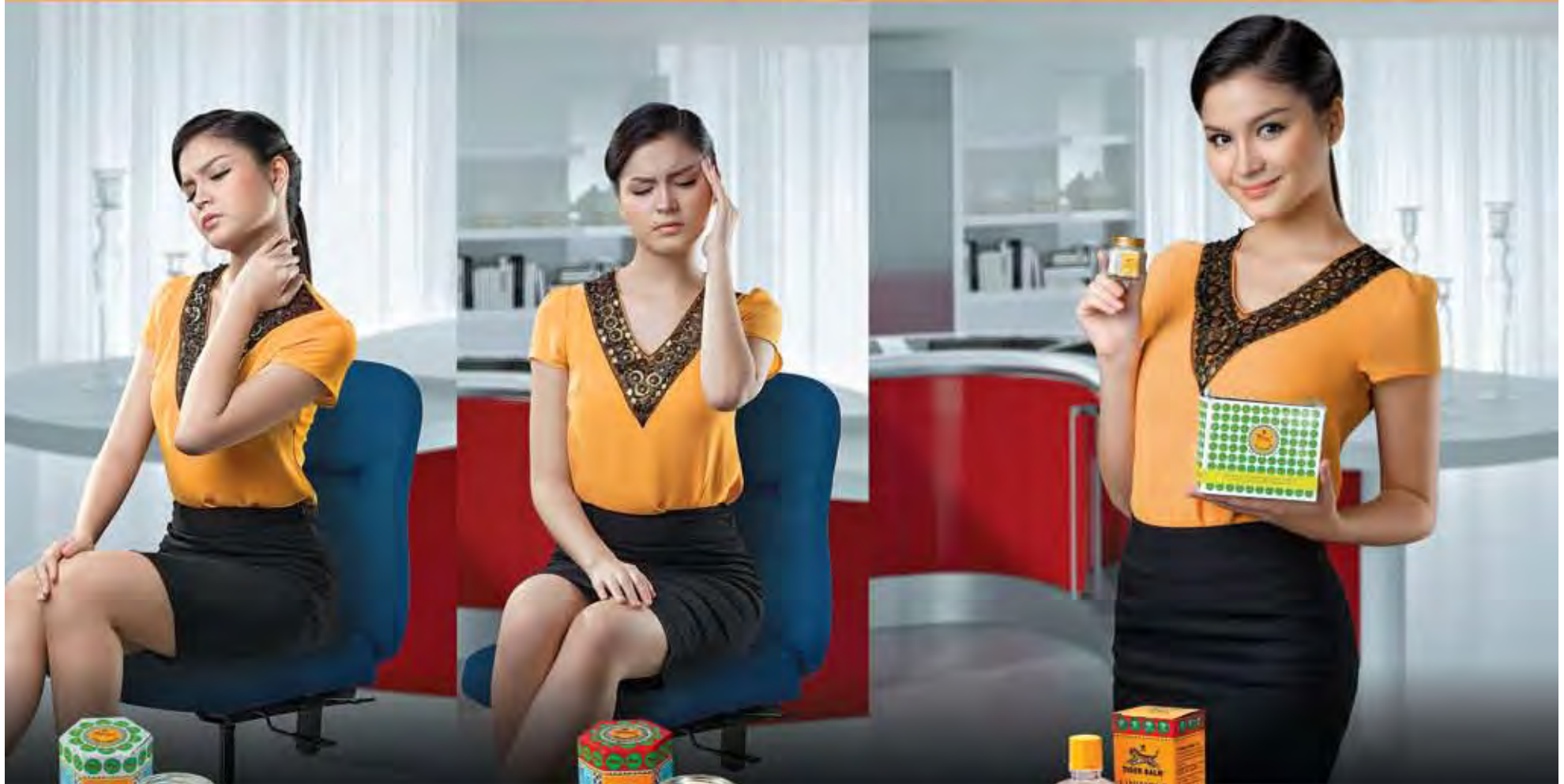
"Such investigation must focus not only on local government and police authorities who carried out unlawful actions, but also senior-most officials in government, military and Wanbao Mining and UMEHL, who have command responsibility," said the report.

"We have already sent our report to the Commission on February 4. Moreover we gave this report to Mr Quintana (UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar) when we met with him on February 13," said U Hla Htun of the Lawyers' Network.

The Lawyers' Network and Justice Trust say the findings of their report pose a challenge to the democratic and reformist path being pursued by the government, but that they believe the government and people are equal to this challenge.



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New rules unclear on media investment

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

RULES and regulations for the Foreign Investment Law issued last month appear to ban foreign investment in the printing and distributing of publications in Myanmar and ethnic minority languages.

Publishing in Myanmar or an ethnic language is one of 21 prohibited sectors under the rules, which were released by the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) on January 31.

Deputy Information Minister U Ye Htut said the prohibition had been put in place to "protect the local media industry" and avoid foreign "influence" in the sector.

"Why we prohibited the FDI in local Myanmar and ethnic languages is to develop the local media business so it can improve. If we allowed foreign companies [they] might be able to not only influence but also monopolise the sector," he said in an email last week.

U Ye Htut said readers should be able to get news from a diversity of media outlets and this was the main reason to protect for local media businesses.

However, he said it was not clear how the rules would affect Myanmar Consolidated Media, which publishes *The Myanmar Times* in both Myanmar and English and is 49 percent foreign owned. Myanmar Consolidated Media was established with MIC approval in 2000.

An unofficial translation of the January 31 rules also indicates that publishing in Myanmar and ethnic languages is in some cases permissible "subject to opinion from the Ministry of Information". Proposed investments in the media sector by companies planning to publish in foreign languages, including English, can only be approved by MIC



A man reads a local journal in Yangon. Pic: AFP

after seeking the advice of the ministry.

"Soon we will announce what percentage foreigners can be involved in *The Myanmar Times*," U Ye Htut said.

"We'll have to analyse all foreign investment according to the new law so as far as I understand no foreigners can be involved in Myanmar and ethnic language publication," he said.

Another inconsistency is in the prohibition on "joint venture of printing and broadcast media enterprise", as the rules later state that investment in FM broadcasting is subject to approval from the government.

In an article published earlier this month, *Weekly Eleven* reported that "[i]ndustry observers say that under these rules the company that publishes *The Myanmar Times* journal will not be able to continue to publish its Myanmar-language newspaper since it is 49pc foreign owned".

Eleven Media Group is working together with Thai-based Nation Group,

publisher of *The Nation*, on its English-language website under a memorandum of understanding signed last year.

But chief editor U Wai Phyo insisted the cooperation would not extend to local language publishing.

"Our first priority is to publish a Myanmar-language daily newspaper, so we won't work with *The Nation* for local languages," he said.

He said the foreign investment rules needed to be clarified in some areas, particularly broadcast media.

Mr Edwin Vanderbruggen, a partner at VDB Loi, a specialised law and tax advisory firm working across Southeast Asia, said the investment law and associated regulations were designed to give MIC "latitude".

"It is a tradeoff between flexibility and arbitrariness," he said. "The government is very concerned about being transparent and even-handed but at the same time when we're talking about promoting investments it's also about making choices."

"There's still a lot of latitude – prohibited activities that you can still work in. But you need special permission," he said. "I don't think vague is the right word. I think there is a necessary measure of flexibility built into the system ... the government needs to have its hands free to accept exceptionally interesting projects that benefit the country even when they also try to protect certain national interests."

Pichai Chuensuksawadi, editor-in-chief of Thailand's *Bangkok Post* newspaper, said he believed the foreign investment law should allow investment in a media company in any language but with a limit on the proportion of foreign ownership allowed. He said that under Thailand's investment rules foreigners can own up to 49pc of a local company in the publishing sector, including those that publish a Thai-language paper.

"For example, both the Post Publishing and Nation Group have had foreigners own shares in the company but this ownership cannot exceed 49pc," he said. "The investment by foreign companies in our company has not had any impact on how we report the news, our analysis or commentaries."

"The real restriction on foreign involvement in Thai media – not related to investment – is a law which prohibits foreigners from working as reporters. This is an old law in place for national security issues. However, foreigners can work as editors and copy editors in English-language newspapers."

U Kyaw Min Swe, chief editor of the *The Voice*, told *The Yangon Times* in early February that foreign investment in the sector could have both positive and negative outcomes. Foreign owners could bring international experience and better understanding of ethical issues but it could also be hard for local businesses to compete, he said.

"The local media industry should have protection from the government," he said. – with Stuart Deed

Ministry of Defence gets spokesman

By Win Ko Ko Latt

DEPUTY Minister for Defence Brigadier General Aung Thaw is to become a media spokesperson for the ministry, Deputy Information Minister U Ye Htut told *The Myanmar Times* last week.

"I have been informed that the post will go to Brig Gen Aung Thaw but don't yet know whether he has assumed this responsibility," he said by email, adding that he will take over the role from Lieutenant Colonel Kyaw Thu, head of the Chief of Staff's Office in the Ministry of Defence.

Observers said the appointment of a spokesperson was badly needed and would help to improve understanding and communication between the people and Tatmadaw. Journalists regularly complain that they are unable to get a response or accurate information from the Tatmadaw, which makes it hard for them to ensure balance on military-related issues, particularly the conflict in Kachin State.

"When a dispute arises, if the media can bring the opinions and concerns of the Tatmadaw to light, people will have greater trust in the Tatmadaw. More transparency will improve accountability," political analyst U Win Min said.

However, the spokesman should be able to speak openly without having to be afraid of his superior, Myanmar Journalists Association chairman Maung Wuntha said.

Greater transparency from not only the Tatmadaw but also other government departments would help

people understand their difficulties, he added.

"I think they have appointed a spokesman so as to make people familiar with the Tatmadaw's activities. But because it's a new position it is difficult to guess how much he can say and how open he can be," said U Win Htein, a Pyithu Hluttaw representative from the National League for Democracy who served in the Tatmadaw for 18 years, retiring as a captain.

U Aung Thu Nyein from Vahu Development Institute said the Tatmadaw was at a disadvantage because, unlike the Kachin Independence Army, it does not allow journalists to visit and report from the front lines. Appointing a spokesman will not solve this problem but represents a step forward, U Aung Thu Nyein said.

In countries such as Indonesia and South Korea, the military not only appoints a spokesperson but also releases annual white papers outlining its planned tasks.

"The more the [spokesperson] answers, the more the [Tatmadaw] will win support from the people. It will be good for both the military and people," he said.

He said the freedom afforded the spokesman to respond to queries from the media was more important than the person's rank.

Ma Nyein Nyein Pyae, a reporter who visited Laiza recently to report on the conflict, said she welcomed the appointment of a spokesman.

"When we write news, there has been no one to ask for the government's side. It is better if we can get the voices of both sides," she said. – Translated by Thit Lwin

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NLD reschedules first assembly to March 8-10

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

AFTER months of delays, the National League for Democracy says it will hold its national assembly from March 8 to 10.

The assembly will be the party's first since its formation more than 24 years ago on September 24, 1988.

The assembly was first meant to be held in December and then pushed back to February because of protests over the holding of lower-level assemblies to select delegates for the national meeting.

However, party general secretary U Nyan Win said in a statement on February 11 the assembly was confirmed for early March.

The statement said commissions will have to submit the personal details of every representative selected to attend the national assembly to head office by February 28.

Pyithu Hluttaw representative U Ohn Kyaing told news agency AFP that about 1500 delegates would attend the assembly.

The process of selecting delegates has been controversial virtually since it began in October, with conflicts breaking



NLD patron U Tin Oo delivers a speech during the party's Union Day ceremony in Yangon on February 12. Pic: EPA

out between rank-and-file party members and officials appointed to assembly organising commissions in Mandalay, Magwe and Ayeyarwarddy regions. Members have accused the commission representatives of using their power to influence the results of ward and township assemblies.

In late October, about 200 members from Patheingyi and Labutta townships in Ayeyarwady Region quit the party over an

assembly-related and set up a social welfare organisation. In January, there was more unrest in Ayeyarwady Region when members in Maubin township protested over the organisation of the township assembly.

In January, members in Mandalay Region's Myingyan township also protested, while a protest planned in urban Mandalay was called off because organisers could not get permission from police.

All parties invited to transition workshop

By Maria Danmark

OFFICIALS from all 54 of Myanmar's registered political parties have been invited to attend a seminar in Yangon this week organised by two European non-government organisations.

Organisers say the February 19-20 meeting is likely to be the first opportunity for officials from the parties to get together and discuss the challenges they face in the democratic transition "across party lines".

"The Role of Political Parties in Democratic Transitions" seminar is hosted by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) and the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD), in cooperation with the Nyein Foundation.

"Our hope is to get all parties to participate and discuss the role of political parties in a democratic transition. Many have said that they will come, so the beginning is promising," said Ms Hanne Lund Madsen, senior adviser at DIPD.

"If everyone comes to the seminar it would be an important opportunity for them to discuss common challenges. They share many of the same challenges, although they have different political positions. It could be a possible beginning to a gradual build-up of a multi-party political platform," she said.

Delegations from both NIMD

and DIPD undertook visits in June and October 2012 to meet a broad spectrum of political actors and explore possible ways of assisting the democratisation process.

The seminar is the first element of a "Myanmar Multiparty Democracy Program" that the organisations are jointly implementing.

It will include workshops on the themes of strengthening party organisation, establishing multi-party dialogue, negotiating democratic space, and responding to voters' expectations. These themes have been decided in close consultation with the parties and what they perceive their key challenges to be.

As well as representatives of political parties and the Union Election Commission, speakers from Nepal, South Africa and Indonesia will also attend the seminar. Organisers say that while the political situation in Myanmar is unique there are opportunities to draw on experiences in other countries that have gone through similar democratic transitions.

"It is an opportunity for the political parties to both share experiences with each other but also from other countries," Ms Lund Madsen said.

The Myanmar Multiparty Democracy Program began on September 1, 2012 and will run until at least the end of this year but is expected to continue for three more years.



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Lt Gen Thein Htay returns to ordinance post in Tatmadaw

By Win Ko Ko Latt

FORMER Minister for Border Affairs Lieutenant General Thein Htay is to return to the army to take up his former role as chief of Army Ordinance Industries, sources said last week.

His removal was not connected to his handling of crises in Rakhine or Kachin states, they said.

President U Thein Sein replaced Lt Gen Thein Htay with Lieutenant General Thet Naing Win from the Ministry of Defence, a move the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approved on February 13.

One Tatmadaw parliamentarian confirmed Lt Thein Htay, who is 58 and has a Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical), Postgraduate Diploma in

Automatic Computing, and MA (Defence), was previously chief of Army Ordinance Industries.

U Hla Swe, an Amyotha Hluttaw representative and former lieutenant general, said Lt Gen Thein Htay oversaw the construction of five major defense industry projects while he was in charge of ordinance industries. He said these factories have now started operating and the army wanted him to run them.

"Lt Gen Thein Htay was a graduate of Yangon Institute of Technology. He later became an army officer but studied as a civilian. I think the reason he was sent back to the army was because he was needed there," said U Hla Swe.

Another Tatmadaw representative agreed Lt

Gen Thein Htay was not being punished for his handling of the Ministry of Border Affairs. He said the move was likely related to the abolition of Ministry of Myanmar Industrial Development, of which Lt Gen Thein Htay was formerly minister, during the fourth parliament session.

U Ye Tun, the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Hsipaw, said: "I think he was brought to the parliament to run this ministry in particular. But the hluttaw criticised the department and cut its budget, saying it was not suitable for the present period. Finally it was abolished. So he was sent back to his mother department [the army] again." - Translated by Zar Zar Soe



From left: Minister for Communications and Information Technology U Myat Hein, Minister for Religious Affairs U San Sint and Minister for Border Affairs Lieutenant General Thet Naing Win in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on February 14, the day they were sworn in to their new roles. Pic: Win Ko Ko Latt

Debate over choice of telecoms minister

By Kyaw Hsu Mon, Aung Shin and Htoo Aung

THE appointment of Air Force chief General Myat Hein as the new minister for communications and information technology has sparked debate over the role of the military in government.

Under the 2008 constitution, General Myat Hein automatically became U Myat Hein when his appointment was confirmed by parliament on February 13. However, observers said the perception would linger that he is acting as a military representative in the government.

The move also attracted criticism in some quarters and appeared to buck the recent trend of more civilians being given both minister and deputy minister posts.

"This position is related to technical knowledge so it is much better if a civilian who has communications and information technology skills is appointed. Appointments should focus on technical criteria. Appointing a military person for this ministry is controversial," said U Khun Htun Oo, chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy.

Democratic Party (Myanmar) chairman U Thu Wai said that while members of the public are likely to be unhappy at the appointment, President U Thein Sein probably chose

U Myat Hein because he knows him to be "reliable".

"Yes, more civilians should be included in the government but people should not automatically assume that having military personnel in the government is bad," he said.

Similarly, U Khin Maung Gyi, a former army officer who is now joint secretary of National Unity Party, said U Thein Sein may have felt that a person from the military was needed to shake up the telecoms ministry, which is currently the subject of a corruption investigation.

"Those army chiefs might be able to assist him, that is why he chose [U Myat Hein]," he said. "It depends on the situation; the president is going to use their experience as he sees fit."

"Anyway, whether they are from the army or civilians, if a person can serve the people properly then they are suitable for the post."

Having only just taken over control of the ministry, it will be at least a few months before any indications about U Myat Hein's performance emerge. U Khin Maung Swe, co-founder of the National Democratic Force (NDF), said he would be closely watched and perhaps more harshly judged than technocrats in the government.

The appointment of U Myat Hein came shortly after the first opposition MP, Dr Tin Shwe of the NDF, was brought into the government

as deputy minister for hotels and tourism.

U Khin Maung Swe said the president should also give ethnic minority politicians or civil servants a chance to join the cabinet to show the government represents the entire union, and not just ethnic Burmese areas.

"It is rare to see ethnic ministers in government so they should also be appointed to ministerial posts. Some ethnic political are talking about that and the president should consider it," he said.

Meanwhile, there were also mixed views in the telecommunications sector over the president's decision.

U Ye Myat Thu, an executive committee from Myanmar Computer Federation, said he was not particularly concerned about the minister's apparent lack of industry knowledge. He said he would be watching to see if the new minister could "manage rather than control" the sector.

"The [progress of the] ministry will depend upon his leadership and management skills," he said.

However, blogger and IT technician Ko Zaw Zaw Myo Lwin said U Myat Hein may have picked up some IT knowledge in the air force. "Being the Air Force commander might mean he is fluent in some technical aspects. He might know the technical side but he won't understand the business element. I think he will face some challenges but he could do well."

Yangon Computer Professional Association chairman U Min Oo the new minister should be given time to settle into the post before being judged.

"I think it is too early to criticise the appointment. There might be a good reason why President U Thein Sein nominated U Myat Hein. The main thing is that he does his job free from corruption because that's what needs to happen in a transparent and democratic government."



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Second Laiza peace march group sets off

By Phyo Wai Kyaw and Hlaing Kyaw Soe

A GROUP of peace marchers from Mandalay Region's Myingyan township plan to travel more than 650 kilometres (400 miles) on foot to the Kachin Independence Organisation headquarters at Laiza to raise awareness about the Kachin conflict.

The group passed through Mandalay on February 14 and hopes to reach Laiza within 20 days, where they will meet up with a similar group from Yangon, one member said last week.

"We started to walk from Myingyan on February 7 with three people, including one monk. The group grew to nine people after passed through Mandalay and we have K3 million from donors in Myingyan to keep us going," said Ko Thant Sin from Myingyan on February 14.

"We can't say exactly when we will reach Laiza but I expect will have to walk at



Activists walk along Mandalay's 26th Street on February 14.

least another 20 days," he said.

He said the authorities in each township had forced members of the group to sign a statement that they had entered the township but otherwise the group had encountered few problems because of the support from residents, particularly National League for Democracy members.

"Walkers of another group from Yangon will travel along the west bank of Ayeyarwady

River and we will combine with them at Laiza. I heard that their group has more than 40 people now," Ko Thant Sin added.

The Yangon group set off on January 21 on a 1300km trek to Laiza. U Aung Myint from Bogale township in Ayeyarwady Region left the Yangon group to meet with the Myingyan walkers.

"We think [walking] is better than sitting and doing nothing for peace," he said on February 14.

Company lodges complaint over sentence reductions

A SENIOR official from a fertiliser manufacturing firm says he is unhappy that three men convicted of imitating his company's products have had their sentences drastically reduced.

Yazatagon managing director U Ye Min Aung said last week has sent complaint letters to the president and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's parliamentary committee over Mandalay Region High Court's January 11 decision to cut the sentences given to former employees of the chemical fertiliser manufacturer.

"This should not have happened in the time when peace is being achieved. Our complaint is aimed at avoiding the same mistake in future," he said.

He also sent the January 29 letter to the chairman of the anti-corruption committee, Vice President Dr Sai Mauk Kham, the Supreme Court, the Attorney General's Office and the chief justice of Mandalay Region.

"Reducing punishments too much encourages perpetrators. It shouldn't have happened. The aim of charging them is so that other manufacturers can avoid having their products imitated as ours were," U Ye Min Aung said.

The convicted trio formerly worked for Yazatagon but took K8.3 million of the company's money and used it to make and distribute imitation chemical fertilisers.

The Pyinmana Township Court sentenced U Thura Setin, U Zaw Min Oo and U Tun Tun Naing to seven, six and eight years imprisonment respectively in June 2012. Their initial appeal to Nay Pyi Taw District Court was rejected.

However, Judge U Kyi Thein of the Mandalay Region High Court reduced the sentences for U Thura Setin and U Zaw Min Oo to one year, and U Tun Tun Naing to one-and-a-half years. -Pyae Thet Phyo, translated by Thit Lwin

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Red Shan in Kachin State hold second militia training

By Khin Su Wai

A RED Shan village in Kachin State has held its second graduation ceremony for a militia training program.

Tar Law Gyi's second militia course started on January 5 and ended on February 9, with 329 participants, militia leader U San Wai said. The militia was formed to protect the village from both Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) soldiers.

"The [Tatmadaw's] 37th Infantry Division organised the graduation party of the second militia course. The Shan nationalities minister for Kachin State couldn't attend the ceremony because [UN human rights envoy Tomas] Quintana was visiting Kachin State but

gave us a formal message," U San Wai said.

About 200 trainees attended the first training program in May 2012, after which the village's militia was formed. He said more courses would be held, and women might be allowed to participate in the third training.

Tar Law Gyi has about 1000 households and is 35 kilometres from Myitkyina on the bank of the Ayeyarwady River. U San Wai said residents faced a constant threat of extortion and forced recruitment.

"Although there were peace talks in Shweli on February 4 the next day one of our villagers, Si Maung, was forcibly recruited by the KIA when he was looking for orchids. Four other villagers who were with him managed to escape," U San Wai said.



The graduation ceremony of the first militia training course in Tar Law Gyi, Kachin State. Pic: Supplied

Industry association warns of mislabelled cooking oils in MDY

By Kyay Mohn Win

EDIBLE oil dealers are warning the public to beware of palm oil mixed with a chemical powder and passed off as peanut oil. The powder is meant to stop it solidifying, said U Tun Tun, secretary of the Association of Edible Oil Merchants and Millers in Mandalay Region.

Last month, the association found that some brands on sale are using the powder, which is imported from China in large quantities and then resold in 1-pound (0.45-kilogram) packages.

"Palm oil solidifies a little in low temperature, as do peanut oil and sesame oil. Now we are trying to find out the side-effects of that powder by contacting the Mandalay City Development Committee. We just want to warn the consumers that those kinds of oil are in the market and they have to be cautious about it," he said.

A member of the edible oil association said the chemical powder, generally called "Ma Khel Say", costs K15,000 a pound, and the



Palm oil is handed out in February 2007. Pic: Archive

fake oil mixed with it costs about K2100 a viss (one viss equals 1.6 kg or 3.6 lbs), much cheaper than real peanut oil.

"We were suspicious of the low price of K2100. By comparison, a viss of palm oil is about K1500 and a viss of imported branded palm oil is K2660. Some avaricious businessmen are using the chemical powder and fragrance oil in unqualified palm oil and selling it cheap as qualified peanut oil. But we can't sell real peanut oil at that price because the raw oil is too expensive," U Than Lwin said.

It's difficult for the oil

association to take action against fake products because they have no laboratory of their own to analyse suspicious products, said oil miller U Zaw Win. Nor does the association have the authority to take suspicious products off the market. All it can do is alert the public, he said.

U Tun Tun said this was just the latest in a succession of cases of edible oils being mislabelled. He said the association wants consumer protection laws enacted and properly enforced to manage the issue, which he said posed a health risk to consumers.

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NLD Tada Oo parliamentarian rejects complaints of cheating

By Phyto Wai Kyaw and Than Naing Soe

A NATIONAL League for Democracy parliamentarian whose constituents are attempting to remove her from office has denied allegations she fixed a party vote to ensure she would be selected to take part in its national assembly next month.

Voters in Mandalay Region's Tada Oo township have collected 1200 signatures and submitted their petition to the Union Election Commission (UEC) to "recall" Daw Khin Thandar, who was elected less than a year ago in the 2012 by-elections.

But she told *The Myanmar Times* last week that her conduct in the Tada Oo township party assembly had been fair and within the rules.

"Tada Oo is a big township ... I have no right to stop [some] voters while they were preparing to vote. Some voters in some townships even marked the names by typing them on a computer. My victory in the township assembly was not achieved through dishonesty.



Tada Oo residents collect signatures for a petition to dismiss their representative at the National League for Democracy office on January 25. Pic: Supplied

The accusers need to take responsibility for what they are saying," she said.

She said the petition to dismiss her was "a sad issue".

"I want the public, not only in Tada Oo but also other townships, to consider carefully whether this is an attempt to attack our party by targeting a [hluttaw representative]," said Daw Khin Thandar.

But Dr Aung Soe Myint,

secretary of the party's district assembly organising commission, said on January 25 that Daw Khin Thandar's "dishonest methods" in the township assembly had been captured on a video recording.

U Myat Swe, an NLD member from Tada Oo's Latsaungyu village, said on February 11 that the petition with 1200 signatures had been submitted to the UEC on February 4.

"We worked on the petition because of our own desire. We don't like her actions," he said. "You can ask anybody around here about her behaviour and they will tell you the same thing."

Under section 396(a) of the constitution, a hluttaw representative can be recalled for high treason, breaching the constitution, misbehaviour, failing to meet the criteria for a hluttaw representative and inefficient discharge of duties.

Constituents must collect signatures from at least 1 percent of people who were eligible to vote when the representative was elected. Tada Oo has about 90,000 eligible voters, so the petition has attracted more than the required 900 signatures.

However, section 397 states that the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw "shall enact the necessary laws" to recall a representative. While the bill to recall a representative was submitted to parliament in August 2012, it has not yet approved.

"We have to wait until the hluttaw enacts the necessary laws," U Myat Swe said.

Traditional artists to help fight trafficking

TRADITIONAL artists are to join the fight against illegal human trafficking. At the request of the police, they will work into their routines warnings of the dangers of trafficking.

Police Brigadier General Khin Maung Si, who is secretary of the Central Body for Suppression of Trafficking in Persons, said on February 5 that the body would enlist the artists to help warn the public about the dangers of trafficking and teach them how to protect themselves.

"Traditional [artists] are the strongest media to distribute knowledge of human trafficking in the countryside during this season of traditional festivals," he said.

Mandalay-based Myanmar traditional performing arts troupes, known as *thabin*, are writing songs and plays to educate their audience about human trafficking, said musician U Sein Tint Lwin.

"The Ministry of Home Affairs has called on our traditional dancers to get involved in the prevention of human trafficking. We see this as a responsibility, and we are very interested. We're creating various plays featuring human trafficking cases," said well-known troupe leader Mandalay Thein Zaw.

"Ko Chit Sayar has written a five-act play, and director Mg Yin Aung has written a one-hour play. Other young traditional dancers such as Phoe Chit, Swan Zarni, Win Naung, Wai Yan Oo and Myo Nanda will also participate in the educational activities," said U Sein Tint Lwin. - *Than Naing Soe and Si Thu Lwin, translated by Zar Zar Soe*

New MCDC tow truck to tackle illegal parking

By Than Naing Soe

MANDALAY drivers who park illegally are likely to have their cars removed, the city development committee has warned.

MCDC has ordered a tow truck from China to help clear the city's streets of vehicles that block the flow of traffic.

"Cars parked along a red-and-white painted kerb or other restricted locations will be towed away and their owners fined. We've already ordered the tow truck from China. It will be put to work as soon as it arrives," warned an official.

Action will be taken jointly by the traffic police and the vehicles and roads supervisory committee, he said.

"There are rules and regulations prescribed by the police department. If traffic police advise that a car is parked illegally, it will be towed and impounded until the fine is paid," he said.

Despite the designation of one-way streets and the widening of some roads in the downtown area, traffic lanes are often blocked by cars illegally parked, or vehicles taking on or letting out passengers or deliveries, an official from the roads and bridges division said.

The K89 million tow truck is expected to arrive next month. - *Translated by Thit Lwin*



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In Myaing, mixed feelings about downfall of 'Bogyoke'

By Aung Shin

IT wasn't long ago that if you saw signs of development in a region, you knew that someone from that area had risen high up through the ranks of the military. Military men who made it to colonel, brigadier general, major general or general traditionally worked to bestow riches on their native town.

Many decades ago, a young boy from Gaunggwe village in Myaing township was taken by his uncle, a Buddhist monk, to the city. He completed school there and joined the military, eventually rising to major general. He often visited his village and was a source of pride for his relatives and neighbours, who admired his honesty, work ethic – and his prospects for promotion to the military's upper echelons. It was the beginning of the development in Myaing township with the support of U Thein Tun, now the former minister for communications and information technology, who the villagers still simply call "Bogyoke".

Myaing township encompasses a semi-arid area of the central dry zone. Residents survive on one crop a year, during monsoon, groundnut, maize, corn and other crops. It is one of the poorer areas in Myanmar, with little access to transport, education or healthcare.

When U Thein Tun became a deputy minister for telecommunications in the military government, it was a cause for celebration in Gaunggwe.

Roads, electricity, schools and village libraries arrived. He became an important icon in the region. Residents waited for him to visit so they could request him to tackle particular development tasks. In the 2010 election he ran as a Pyithu Hluttaw candidate for the Union Solidarity and Development Party and easily beat his rival from the National Unity Party. The election campaign was a kind of "golden age" for this neglected corner of the country, taking the pork-barrelling of the past to greater heights.

In the past two years, since his elevation to minister for telecommunications (later renamed to communications and information technology), mobile phone network coverage was installed across Myaing township.



Myaing township residents board a bus bound for Mandalay. Pic: Aung Shin

"Yes, Bogyoke [U Thein Tun] looked after our region indeed. Before, we never had such a high-profile person from our region," said Ko Ye Aung, a resident of Latyatma village, not far from Gaunggwe.

However, the funding for development projects in Myaing slowed over the past two years, and the minister paid fewer visits to the region. His resignation on January 16 came as a shock to residents, who still expected U Thein Tun to keep promises to renovate or build schools, improve roads and make donations to specific projects.

"I feel sad about his dismissal. We have much gratitude for the chance to get his assistance. He provided many things for our region in terms of education, health, electricity, transportation and telecommunication. He helped many villages. He gave us hope that our region can become more developed," said U Chit Hla from Gaunggwe.

Like most of the country, even his family are in the dark about the exact reason for his downfall.

"Our parents – U Pywat and Daw Phayaon – have passed away already. 'Maunggyi' (big brother, U Thein Tun) was away from our village since he was a boy. We rarely had contact with him lately because he is always fully occupied in his ministerial post. Now we just heard that he resigned from his position. We don't know anything more detailed. But we will miss his position because it meant development projects in our region," said Daw Kyi, the youngest sister of U Thein Tun, who has five siblings.

But not all areas in Myaing benefited equally from U Thein Tun's patronage, with the villages clustered around Gaunggwe the most well supported.

"We know U Thein Tun. We know about him. Maybe he a good man to his relatives and his village but regional development should not depend on where someone important comes from," said Ko Myo, a resident from Myaing's Linkataw village.

When he was elevated to minister with the formation of U Thein

Sein's government in March 2011, U Thein Tun had to resign as a Pyithu Hluttaw representative. His seat was filled through a by-election in April 2012, which was won by National League for Democracy candidate U Myint Aung.

Ko Bo Tint, an NLD information officer from Myaing township, described U Thein Tun as an "obstacle" for the party.

"We were blocked in some villages because of U Thein Tun during the by-election. He has already organised many villagers. Those people were unhappy to see us, and disliked receiving other political party members," he said.

But U Than Aung from Gaunggwe insisted that U Thein Tun would be fondly remembered in Myaing.

"It doesn't depend on which party he represented, just his actions for our region. I will support any party or person if they help develop our village," he said. "[Because of U Thein Tun's resignation] we are all desperate and helpless. We no longer look forward more development in our villages."

Proposal calls for law changes to fight abuse of powers

By Soe Than Lynn

THE head of the Myanmar Police Force has voiced support for a proposal to enact new legislation to punish officials involved in abuse-of-power cases involving legally owned movable or fixed assets.

Deputy Minister for Home Affairs and Police Force Director General Kyaw Kyaw Tun told the hluttaw on February 6 said the parliament should record the proposal, saying the stronger legislation would support the rights enshrined in section 347 of the constitution, which outlines the "fundamental rights and duties of citizens".

"Section 356 also states that movable and fixed assets legally owned by citizens shall be protected by the law. If there are any power abuse cases that lead to damage to properties, offenders will be brought to justice," he said.

"The existing laws should be reviewed and amended in harmony with the circumstances. The motion

'Laws to protect the rights of citizens should come into force rather than just being enacted on paper.'

to review the existing laws to let people who suffer for damage to their properties fully enjoy rights enshrined in the constitution and bring power abusers to justice and to impose a clear-cut special law that can safeguard the people should be recorded."

U Thein Nyunt said laws were needed to confirm the rights of citizens that are mentioned in the constitution.

"These rights should come into force rather than merely being enacted on paper," he said.

He cited a number of examples where power had been abused in a way that harmed the material assets of citizens, including one case involving renowned writer U Win Maung, better known as Min Yu Wai.

He read a letter from the writer in which he asked for justice after a court had ruled that he sell the house and land he legally owned for K28 million, despite its real value being closer to K600 million.

"The constitution enacted sections to ensure the rights of citizens. But those who want to [send complaint] letters have to submit them to the Union Supreme Court in Nay Pyi Taw. This is very difficult for most people because they need to come to Nay Pyi Taw hiring a lawyer," U Thein Nyunt said.

Deputy Attorney General U Tun Tun Oo said the proposal should not be widely discussed because respective government departments have already made arrangements to amend existing laws in line with the proposal.

But Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann said the proposal would be recorded and the hluttaw will monitor whether the government amends existing laws in line with the proposal.

Govt responds to criticism of High Court, region office tender

By Soe Than Lynn

TWO historic buildings in Yangon, the High Court and Yangon Region office complex, have not been sold to private companies, a government official told parliament earlier this month.

Deputy Attorney General U Tun Tun Oo said the buildings remain state owned but were leased to private firms because the government could not afford to renovate them.

"Maintenance work for these buildings is costlier than constructing new buildings and experienced technicians will have to be hired. Both buildings are so old that the state will have to pour millions of dollars into it if they are to be refurbished," he said on February 7 in response to a proposal from Thura U Aung Ko of Kanpetlet.

"Therefore, the unused rooms of the High Court will be transformed into a

museum and the office complex into an international standard, five-star hotel with private investment with a view to preserving the buildings and earning more revenue from tourism without the state having to spend money," he said.

Tun Foundation was the only company that bid for the 107-year-old High Court building, U Tun Tun Oo said. Under its proposal, it will establish a reference library with two million e-books and 200,000 hard copy books published since 1949 in vacant rooms.

"The remaining rooms of the High Court will still be used as court rooms and this is a voluntary contribution by a citizen who loves the High Court and wants to preserve Myanmar culture. They will both continue to be state-owned," U Tun Tun Oo said.

The tender for the 90-year-old Yangon Region office complex, which was formerly the headquarters of the Burma Socialist Program Party, was won by Flying Tiger Company, which will work with Singapore-based

Diamond Asia Capital on a hotel project. The proposal was approved by both the President's Office and Myanmar Investment Commission, he said.

Thura U Aung Ko, who submitted the motion "to urge the Union Government to preserve High Court building and office complex building as protected buildings having reviewed the matter of handing over to private companies", said he was pleased at U Tun Tun Oo's response.

"If the highest levels of the High Court will be a legal library and museum and the remaining levels will be left in their original state, then we embrace it," he said.

When the speaker asked his opinion about the office complex building, he said: "We have learnt that 30 percent of the renovation work of the office complex has been completed. I no longer want to object to it because from what U Tun Tun Oo said I realise how expensive renovating the buildings will be."

- Translated by Thit Lwin

National planning bill needs to change, say MPs

By Soe Than Lynn

HLUTTAW representatives, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, last week criticised the government's national planning bill for 2013-14, saying it does not reflect the desires of the people.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for Kawhmu, said the bill needed to be amended to more closely match the priorities of the public.

"National plans are not drawn by hluttaw [representatives] so they don't really match the desires of the people. But it is also difficult to say that the plans do not totally reflect the desire of the parliament or the people. It reflects [them] to some extent. I think the ... government will need to recognise the proposed [changes] from the [hluttaw] representatives," she told *The Myanmar Times* on February 15, after three days of debate over the bill.

Pyithu Hluttaw representative U Sai Thiha Kyaw of Mong Yawng said during a discussion in parliament on February 13 that the aim of the bill, which was submitted by the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, should be to reduce the development gap between states and regions.

"When drawing up the national planning bill, short-term and long-term plans should aim to narrow the gap between regions and states or different ethnic groups," he said.

"The government should pay proper regard to people's voices, people's desires and people's opinions when formulating national planning. Though parliamentarians present some of people's desires in the hluttaw, the national plans drawn up so far lack these voices," he said.

He cited the example of land grabbing complaints. "Complaint letters from farmers saying that they wanted to 're-own' their land and cultivate it again have deluged the



MPs attend the opening of the fourth session of the Pyithu Hluttaw in Nay Pyi Taw on July 4, 2012. Pic: AFP

parliament. In the national planning bill, there are no policies, objectives or plans laid down by the relevant ministries to reflect the desires of farmers, who make up 70 percent of the population of the country. The government should take special interest in farmers' affairs. Not only do they need to be able to eat three meals a day but their quality of life should be enhanced. I would like to submit that the national planning bill be revised to contain policies reflecting the desires of farmers," he said.

U Sai Thiha Kyaw said Myanmar's long-running armed conflicts had been prolonged by the government making little attempt to address issues of inequality, persecution and bullying, and "disproportionate development plans" only reinforced these problems.

He said material progress - through the building of roads and bridges, improvement of communication, and provision of electricity, education and health services - was needed as soon as possible.

U Sai Thiha Kyaw was one of 14 MPs who joined the discussion on February 13. After the bill is amended and approved over the coming weeks, the government will submit

its draft budget for 2013-14 based on the revised planning bill.

For the first time, senior ministry officials, including managing directors, director generals and deputy director generals, were invited to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to listen to the debate. Fourteen senior officials were present when the national planning bill discussion started on February 13, while 28 attended on February 14 and 20 the following day.

"We invited senior officials who are responsible for planning in their respective ministries in accordance with agenda of the debate," said U Khin Maung Oo, a director in the Hluttaw Office.

The invitations continue the office's outreach program, which has seen students, and members of political parties and ethnic minority youth organisations invited to attend parliament sessions.

But he said the attendance of senior ministry officials as observers last week was a first.

Officials interviewed by *The Myanmar Times* in the hluttaw said they had paid careful attention to the discussions.

"We made notes of the comments from the MPs and also recorded the

discussion. We will amend the bill after we submitted it to the union government. This bill is certainly not finished yet," said one director general, who asked not to be named.

Another director general conceded the national planning bill was less than perfect but said government officials faced a number of constraints while drawing up the draft legislation.

"We worked properly when we draw the plans but we did not have much time and some things were rushed. So it's difficult to say that the plans we drew lacked the people's voice or desire because we have to make an assessment based on the budget of the government and some other limitations," said a director general, who asked not to be named.

"The plans that we drew can be successful ... we have prioritised critical areas. But we will need to amend the planning bill based on the MPs suggestions," he said.

- Translated by *Thit Lwin*

'Bengali' group arrested in NPT

By Win Ko Ko Latt

MYANMAR Police Force apprehended 12 "Bengalis" as they entered Nay Pyi Taw on February 10, Nay Pyi Taw Council secretary U Aung Khin said last week.

He said members of the group attempted to cover themselves as the car they were travelling in entered the capital.

"They have no National Registration Card," U Aung Khin said.

He said that they came from Kyauktaw township in Rakhine State through Magwe Region, where an official reported the car to his counterparts in Nay Pyi Taw.

"When this car entered into Magwe, it got a flat tyre and when they changed the tyre people approached and they drove off, leaving the old tyre on the road," he said.

When the vehicle approached a toll gate on the Yangon-Nay Pyi Taw Highway near Dukkinathiri township, an official checked and reported the car to the Highway Police Force, he said. The suspects then left the car and ran into nearby

farmland. After a chase involving 35 police, as well as construction workers and villagers, they were apprehended in Donengwe village in Dukkinathiri, he said.

The driver of the car, who is thought to be a Myanmar national, escaped.

U Aung Khin said the group included eight men and four women.

'After a chase involving 35 police, as well as construction workers and villagers, they were apprehended.'

They were charged under section 6(b) of the 1949 Myanmar National Registration Act section 6(2) and sent to Zabbuthiri Township Court.

The Voice quoted Police Colonel Nay Win as saying that the group was hoping to eventually get to Malaysia by crossing into Thailand at Myawaddy.

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Peoples in the Winds of Change

An open letter to the KIO

COMMENT
with
Sandar Lwin



THE firm stance of the Kachin Independence Organisation – and other armed ethnic groups – on its quest for greater autonomy should be commended. The path to federalism in our country has been, as we all know, a long and bloody one, resulting in some of the world's longest-running civil wars. Despite battling with the much more powerful Tatmadaw, the KIO and other groups have not given up their commitment to a federal state. It is my hope that you enjoy the fruit of these attempts.

While it has taken six decades of warfare, some conditions favourable to federalism have appeared. Public awareness of federalism has increased because of the regular discussions your groups, as well as parliamentarians from ethnic parties in the parliament. For example, Myanmar citizens regularly read the words of KIO spokesperson U La Nan, chairman U Zawng Hra, and Major General Gun Maw about federalism and self-determination through private media publications. Furthermore, even union minister and peace negotiator U Aung Min has started talking about federalism. Scholars are writing about the top, offering support. Some Burmese

politicians are also talking about it. In November 2012, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi publicly stated that she believes in a federal system and that it is the only viable solution to ethnic conflicts in our country. The establishment of state and region parliaments and government under the 2008 constitution is also a move towards a more federal state.

In my opinion, to initiate political change in a society you have to take into account the government that is in power. If we don't do this, it is normally very hard to reach your goal. We have witnessed a very good example from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's attempt to introduce a democratic system of government.

She and other political figures introduced the idea to change into a democratic system but I think they overlooked the power of the government. Whether you like or not, there needs to be some kind of transition mechanism. After the 1990 election, the military government created and initiated a transitional mechanism of its liking, which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi initially rejected. Other politicians were also very hesitant to abide by it. What resulted was two decades of political repression as the government ground down opposition to its program.

If she had not eventually joined the government-instituted democratisation process, it is quite possible that it would have gone ahead without her – and with the



A platoon of Kachin Independence Army commandos at the Ma Ga Khat outpost near Mai Ja Yang on January 22. Pic: Kaung Htet

participation of the majority of the people. However, it certainly would not have been so smooth or fast. After negotiating with the government, she oversaw the re-registration of the National League for Democracy (NLD), competed in the April 2012 by-election held under the government's transition mechanism and won a historic landslide victory.

Today she serves as a member of parliament but at the same time reminds us regularly that there is a long way to go until we achieve a real democratic system and what we need to do to make that goal a reality. In my opinion, she has set an example of the importance of being flexible in your approach without losing the sight of your original goal.

Similarly, there are many questions of tactics to consider as we Myanmar ethnic races walk this new path to federalism. The previous government introduced a transitional implementation mechanism of its liking in the form of the 2008 constitution. We can see that most people are abiding by that document and political parties holding the same desire for federalism formed and ran in the 2010 election.

The present government has

introduced a new mechanism for ethnic armed groups to interact with parliament, which has the legislative power to change the system. Here again, almost all of the armed groups – 10 groups out of 11 – abided by that mechanism and joined the government's peace process with an agreement to have a national ethnic convention. The government has pledged to take the results of the convention to parliament to institute the wishes of the participants.

This process is fragile but is slowly moving forward. It is important to recognise that under the current system, the power to decide whether to introduce a federal structure of ethnic groups' liking no longer resides with the executive alone. For this kind of change, we cannot ignore the power of the legislature. It can be hoped that the parliament would approve the principle of federalism, although it is likely there will also be some negotiations. Those negotiations remain far off but the conditions are promising.

Like the transition to democracy, there are many reasons to believe that the process towards a form of federalism will move forward without organisations that cannot abide by the government's transition mechanism.

What does this mean for the KIO, one of the strongest proponents of this movement? This is a crucial time for the KIO. There is a strong likelihood that if the group's leaders cannot show patience with the mechanism introduced by the government, the political reasons for holding arms will evaporate.

I think the KIO should try to be patient with the mechanism introduced by the government without losing the sight of the goal of federalism. As for applying international pressure on the government, we have discovered from the experience with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD that this approach can have many negative effects for the rest of the population.

Now is the time to be practical. In aiming to realise your goal, you should prioritise the tactic that will bring about the best and smoothest result for the people. The government's peace building committee recently said that it is preparing a framework for political dialogue with the KIO before a national ethnic convention. So my message to the KIO is this: please be clever enough to grab this historic opportunity to achieve federalism in Myanmar.

The Mail Box



Dear editor,

I have read with great interest the reports by Kyaw Hsu Mon on January 14 ("Doubts over Spitfire 'find' in Myanmar") and January 28 ("Team still chasing Spitfire dream") and Derek Tonkin's report on February 4 ("Myanmar's phantom Spitfires: how a legend was born") regarding the search for Spitfires buried in Burma. Whilst serving as a British Officer in Indian Engineer Units in the Burma Campaign in the rapid advance to recapture Rangoon

in May 1945 and subsequently commanding Indian Engineer Units working at Mingalardon Airport, I was aware of the activities of other engineer units both during the campaign and afterwards. At no time did I experience, hear or read of aircraft being buried. The "Bush Telegraph" as it was known was always active and aware of the activities of all units of the 14th Army and I am sure that I would have known of any attempt to bury aircraft.

Yours faithfully,
Roger W R Browning

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Labour activist slams 'unethical' blog report

NCUB secretary rejects report of his firing published on 'Irrawaddy'

By Nan Tin Htwe

A LABOUR activist who returned to Myanmar last year after years of exile says he will sue the newspaper *Irrawaddy* for "unethical reporting".

U Maung Maung, general secretary of the National Council of the Union of Burma, told reporters last week that a Myanmar-language article in the *Irrawaddy* blog of February 8 had damaged his reputation and that of his organisation.

The story headlined "NCUB General Secretary fired" alleged that U Maung Maung had "broken the rules" of the organisation, and accused him of failing to repay borrowed money. It was based on a press release signed by U Myint Thein, the group's joint secretary.

"It's unethical and unfair. I will not accept a correction, but take legal action. It hurts my name which I've built for 20 years, as well as the image of my organisation," said U Maung Maung, insisting to local journalists that the report was "totally wrong".

"*Irrawaddy* has no ethics. They

didn't approach me for comment and did not seek confirmation from anyone. They could have contacted me, or anyone from the NCUB," said a visibly angry U Maung Maung. "*Irrawaddy* should change now that we're in a transition to democracy."

U Maung Maung sought exile in Thailand after the 1988 student uprising, and became involved in

'They didn't approach me for comment and did not seek confirmation.'

NCUB, which says it advocates for democracy, human rights and federalism in Myanmar, after the organisation was founded in 1992.

He returned to Myanmar in September and started advocating for labour rights, offering training on labour rights with the International Labour Organisation in Myanmar.

U Myint Thein told reporters via Skype from Chiang Mai that

he had not drafted or signed the press release and only knew about the news when he was informed by U Maung Maung.

"What I can say is that our organisation never made that announcement. I never signed it," he said.

"U Maung Maung has worked hard for our organisation and for labour rights in general," U Myint Thein said.

"I've been doing this job, neglecting my children and family. Some people from Mandalay called and asked me about the reports. It does affect me but I will not stop what I'm doing because of it," U Maung Maung said.

Daw Aye Chan Myae, editor of *The Irrawaddy's* Myanmar-language blog, said that her organisation had no responsibility for any story that appeared on the blog.

"For the blog, we post everything, even gossip that we've heard from somewhere. He is saying [he will sue] because he doesn't know what a blog is. If a story is on our news website, we will try to confirm whether it's true or not. If he takes legal action, I'll respond at that time," she said.

Chin National Day to be marked legally for first time since 1988

By Naw Say Phaw Waa

CHIN National Day will be marked legally this week for the first time since 1988, a Chin National Party official said last week.

The decision to allow Chin groups across the country to mark the February 20 milestone follows an agreement between government peacemakers and the Chin National Front (CNF) on January 6 in the state capital Haka, CNP adviser Dr Kim Jim Dar said last week.

"We couldn't celebrate Chin National Day since 1988. Now the president and [CNF] got the agreement and it is not prohibited anymore. We've never really celebrated Chin State Day; only the state government marks it, in Haka. We only celebrate Chin National Day," he said.

The event marks the day in 1948 when representatives in the Chin assembly voted to end feudalism and instead elect representatives democratically.

Dr Kim Jim Dar said earlier practices effectively meant most people "are like slaves" to hereditary rules.

Magwe Region Chin ethnic affairs minister U Saline Hla Htun said the decision to allow Chin people to celebrate the day marked another step forward for ethnic rights.

"We are glad and satisfied to do it legally as well," he told *The Myanmar Times* last week.

"Also, the election of ethnic affairs ministers is also welcomed by ethnic minorities because we can focus on issues like Chin National Day."

He said the Chin National Day will be marked in all areas with significant populations of Chin people, with the largest to be held in Haka in conjunction with an official ceremony.

In Yangon, an event is planned for Hlaing Min Galar Hall in Hlaing township, said one the organisers, Tg Kap Pu, 25.

He said he was "very happy and very proud" to be able to mark Chin National Day legally.

"It has been more than 25 years since we could last do it but now the new government has taken over we can celebrate again. I feel very happy about that. And I'm very thankful to the government for recognising our Chin National Day," Tg Kap Pu said.

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Registration centres in Thailand reopened

Second phase of school program ends

By Sann Oo

SAETANAR, an international NGO that builds schools, has just handed over its 200th school building to the education department of southern Shan State. The handover took place at Inn Nge village tract in Pindaya township on February 9 and marked the end of a US\$3 million program launched in 2007 and funded by Nippon Foundation of Japan.

No 83 Inn Nge 2 Basic Education Primary School was completed as part of the Education for Peace and Development (EPD) project, which is conducted with the Ministry of Border Affairs.

Nippon Foundation chairman Mr Yohei

Sasakawa told participants in the ceremony: "I become a Shan national today."

Wearing Shan national dress, Mr Sasakawa said villagers and schoolchildren in Myanmar were more enthusiastic about education than the Japanese.

"If you work hard at your education, you will be able to produce leaders for Shan State as well as for the country," he said, recalling the importance of education as Japan rebuilt itself after the Second World War.

"I want to thank the Nippon Foundation for its efforts for the development of the region and the nation," Shan State Chief Minister U Sai Aung Myat said at the ceremony.

The school, which has four teachers and 87 students,

is about 26 kilometres (16 miles) from Pindaya. The Nippon Foundation provided K18.4 million to build the school, while the villagers contributed their labour. The foundation later handed over K3.2 million in labour charges to the village to fund microfinance development programs.

Mr Sasakawa said he had built schools over the world, but had found the practice of villagers participating in school construction only in Myanmar.

U Htoo Ko Ko, chairman of Leading Body of the Danu Self-Administered Zone, said Nippon Foundation had helped build nine schools in the region. Between 2002 and 2007, Saetanar had built a total of 102 school buildings in southern and northern Shan State with

\$3 million from Nippon Foundation. The opening of the Inn Nge school marked the completion of the second phase of the project.

"The ministry and Nippon Foundation agreed to build 100 school buildings between 2007 and 2013 with a fund of \$3 million. This phase is now complete," said U Htway Hla, director general of the Department of the Development of Border Areas. He said \$5 million had been provided to build more schools through to 2018.

Mr Sasakawa also visited the Inn Paw Khone Ywa Thit Basic Education Post-Primary School in Nyaungshwe township on February 10. The school was also built under the EPD project and opened last year.

By Bill O'Toole

ELEVEN migrant worker processing centres in Thailand reopened last week, as the Myanmar government said it was taking steps to curb rampant corruption and extortion in the registration process.

The Myanmar embassy in Thailand announced the centres had resumed accepting applications on February 15, two months after they closed. The centres allow undocumented migrant workers in Thailand, of which there are thought to be about 1.3 million, to register and receive temporary passports and work visas.

"This is good news for Myanmar workers," said U Hsein Htay, a Yangon-based representative for the Migrant Workers' Rights Network (MWRN). "But there are still problems."

Chief among these is that the deadline for registering is April 15, which many observers worry does not give workers enough time to apply. During meetings with his counterparts in Thailand last week, Deputy Minister for Labour U Myint Thein reportedly asked Thai officials to set a more realistic deadline. No change has yet been announced.

Corruption remains a key concern for activists and rights advocates both in Thailand and abroad. A report published recently by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) that accompanied the Myanmar embassy's announcement said the price of work documents will vary depending on the job sector and region but will not cost more than US\$150.

Officially, that is; MWRN and other sources have reported brokers and corrupt officials at the centres demanding heavy additional payments, driving the cost as high as \$700. In a recent open letter to Daw Aung Sun Suu Kyi, MWRN said: "We fear this new process is not much different from the previous process and it may also favour

the agencies, brokers, and corrupt officials who exploit undocumented Myanmar migrant workers."

The combat this corruption, the Myanmar Department of Labour has started publishing a list of phone numbers migrants can call if they are asked to make additional payments. The numbers will connect them with representatives stationed at all 11 registration sites in Thailand and the department said the list will be both posted in each of the migrant centres and distributed directly to workers.

The list is just one element of what IOM said is a larger effort to keep migrant workers informed of their rights to curb corruption.

"Our support will include a targeted information campaign at migrant hot-spot areas across Thailand. We'll be mobilising our partners in local migrant networks, and working with the Department of Employment, the International Labour Organisation, and the Migrant Working Group to raise awareness of the grace period among all those employing migrant workers," said Mr Jow Lowry, a spokesperson for the IOM regional office in Bangkok.

U Hsein Htay said most of the migrant workers he has spoken with so far do not know about the list of numbers, but added: "It's still early in the process. I think this time around there could be more transparency and accountability."

He said that his contacts in Thailand had reported a noticeable decline in additional "fees" charged to migrant workers. He said this was because of increased pressure from rights groups and international agencies. "The eyes of the world are upon this issue," he said.

Still, problems remain on both sides of the border. A source at the Department of Labour in Nay Pyi Taw said Myanmar officials can make millions of kyat from illegal fees if they are posted to a passport issuing centre in Thailand for a few months.

Nippon Foundation donates to Kayin IDPs

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

THE Nippon Foundation of Japan provided US\$30,000 of emergency supplies to displaced people in Kayin State last week to mark Union Day.

The donation was the second tranche of a \$3 million project the organisation is implementing to support refugees living in areas controlled by armed ethnic groups.

The donation ceremony took place in the Kayin State capital Hpa-an and was attended by Nippon Foundation chairman Mr Yohei Sasakawa and representatives of the government and Karen National Union (KNU).

Kayin State Chief Minister U Zaw Min said: "We thank the Nippon Foundation for this donation. Today, the Kayin people enjoy the fruits of peace. Now we need development."

Mr Sasakawa pledged more assistance for the future.

"This is the first time we've received this kind of assistance. The Karen people have lived as innocent victims of the conflict between the government and ethnic armed groups for 20 years. The aid we are receiving now is a result of the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the government and the KNU," said the KNU's head of health and welfare, Major Saw Roger Khin.

The participants then proceeded to Tarit Po Kwee village, near a KNU-



Pic: Aung Htay Hlaing

Karen National Union soldiers with food supplies donated by Nippon Foundation in Tarit Po Kwee village, in a KNU-controlled region of Kayin State's Hlaingbwe township.

held part of Kayin State's Hlaingbwe township, and distributed 70 tonnes of rice to displaced people.

The program is run under the framework of an agreement between the Myanmar government and a grouping of ethnic organisations called the

United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC). The Chiang Mai-based council, established in February 2011, has 11 members.

The first donation under the project was made at a ceremony in the Mon State capital of Mawlamyine on December 22, during which

representatives from the foundation gave \$70,000 worth of emergency supplies to the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

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

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Shangri-La targets Q3 for Yangon serviced apartments

SHANGRI-LA Residences Yangon, a twin tower project beside Kandawgyi Lake, is on target to be ready by the third quarter of this year, a company official said last week.

Shangri-La Residences includes two 21-storey towers of 120 apartments each. The apartments are surrounded by 15 acres of landscaped gardens and will offer a range of recreational facilities, including a gym, swimming pool, tennis courts and a mini mart, the developer says.

Communications manager Ma Phyo May Win said the project had been restarted – work first began in the late 1990s – to cater to the growing demand for upscale serviced apartments.

“Accommodation in Yangon is in short supply so we chose to make it a residential project when we restarted it,” she said.

However, she declined to say when an adjoining hotel project would be completed.

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism says the hotel will include 800 rooms, along with a supermarket and offices.

Shangri-La is also developing Traders Square Commercial Complex beside Traders Hotel, with a targeted completion date of 2015. The multi-storey commercial tower will offer offices, retail space and underground parking, and will be linked to Traders Hotel.

– Yu Yu Maw



One of the Shangri-La owned towers beside Kandawgyi Lake. Pic: Kaung Htet

Power struggle engulfs Mandalay village

By Soe Sandar Oo and Shwe Ku Thit Sar

RESIDENTS of Hnakyatkway village are accusing Mandalay regional authorities of an attempted power grab – by stealing their community’s electricity.

The row culminated in a showdown on January 29, when defiant monks and villagers came out in force to defend their electrical installations from Mandalay Region officials who tried to connect the village to the regional grid.

Hnakyatkway village, in Kyaukpadaung township in western Mandalay Region, had no electricity until 2007. U Kawthala, a monk who is chairman of the village’s electricity supply board committee, held a press conference at the Myanmar Journalist Network office in Kyauktada township, Yangon, on February 8 to explain the events.

“In 2007 we got permission to install 11-megawatt cables,” he said. The village spent K70 million developing its power installations, and now has 145 meter boxes and 63 cable poles. But on January 29, the regional electricity minister, Dr Myint Kyu, accompanied by engineers, township officials and police turned up to demand that the village be connected with the regional grid,” said U Kawthala, who called the regional officials “robbers and bullies”.

U Kawthala rejected Dr Myint Kyu’s demand.

Village head U Maung Mya said the authorities then tried to make the connection by force. “But the monks, novices and villagers surrounded the pole and defended it,” he said. “We shouted that we don’t want bullies. We acted to protect the cable poles that we built with our own money, with our own strength,” he said.

“The president may have changed for the better, but there are still corrupt public officials that want to bully the public,” he added.

Despite three police orders to disperse, the standoff lasted until nightfall, when the officials departed.

A spokesperson for the Union Ministry of Electric Power said the villagers had the right to install

their own electricity. The township authorities were not allowed to tap into the village supply without the villagers’ permission, he said, adding that the township could also offer compensation to the village before assuming control of the power supply.

Police in Kyaukpadaung refused to comment when contacted by *The Myanmar Times*.

However, Dr Myint Kyu said the regional government is acting for the greater good, adding that there are 800 households in the village that do not receive electricity, and these people have asked to be connected to the grid. He said the 145 households that do get power are near the monastery.

“According to the law, the public cannot be connected to cables for religious use because the government gives electricity to religious building 24 hours a day,” Dr Myint Kyu said, adding that the monastery was supplying its electricity to the 145 nearby households.

“So if we provide the other 800 households with normal electrical power, they might complain when their electricity is cut and other residents near the monastery still have power.”

“The village should not have two electricity supply boards, with one supplying power to 145 households and another board looking after the other 800 households.”

“We are trying to solve this problem by combining all the households in one group, and separating them from the monastery but the monks will not let us touch the power network.”

“We have not been violent, even though the villagers and monks have been rough with us. And I commend the police for not using violence. But we will take action in accord with the law regardless of whether the people involved are monks or ordinary citizens. No man is above the law and the authorities must do their duties.”

He added that the 145 households will not be compensated for the money they have spent on electricity infrastructure because they will be part of the wider grid.

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2. Help in development, pre-testing, and production of culturally relevant communication materials and timely and effective utilization;
3. Assist in developing and expanding partnerships with religious groups, traditional leaders and other organized groups in the community, as well as civil society organization, to solicit their involvement in the implementation of the programme;
4. Assist in developing training/orientation materials and organize/conduct activities to build capacity for BHS, volunteers and communities;
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8. Assist the Communication for Development Specialist in any other assignment.

QUALIFICATIONS, SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES required to perform the duties of the post:

- Preferably advanced university degree in relevant field, e.g., communications, public health, social sciences, advocacy, health education or a related field combined with relevant experience;
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In Dawei, activists and r

By Marcus Rhinelander

A DOZEN dusty riders cycle past a sign reading KM 0+000 just after noon on **January 31**, ending a 400-mile, seven-day trip from Yangon to the site of a proposed special economic zone in Dawei, Tanintharyi Region. A crowd of more than 100 people burst into applause as the riders pass both the concrete kilometre marker and a very different sign: a poster with a photo of President U Thein Sein and principles he has espoused for foreign investment, including “to protect the integrity of Myanmar citizens” and “to allow environmentally-friendly investment”.

The awareness-raising bike ride, as well as the civil society members and residents who turned out to meet them, are all indicative of the rapid rise of citizen activism in Myanmar. The extent to which this resistance has spread throughout the area portends significant challenges for the government’s plans.

The Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is slated to be the largest industrial project in Southeast Asia, with an initial investment of US\$8.2 billion. If the project goes ahead as planned, it could eventually cost as much as \$60 billion and cover up to 204 square kilometres, not including an associated reservoir or road and rail corridor to Thailand.

Myanmar and Thailand signed agreements to build the deepwater port and industrial complex at Dawei in 2008 and 2010 and work on access roads to the site started in 2011. Thailand hopes to benefit by converting itself into the “transport hub” of Southeast Asia, with high speed and freight rail links to China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia meshing with the proposed rail link to Dawei.

The project has attracted significant support from leaders of both countries. It also comes at a time when Myanmar is trying to attract greater foreign investment, particularly in manufacturing. But the political reforms that have accompanied the recent economic liberalisation have released pent-up frustration over the project and allowed activists and residents to raise their voices in protest.

GREEN Bike is a Yangon-based cycling group dedicated to promoting bicycles as a healthy and sustainable mode of transportation. The group left Yangon in the pre-dawn darkness of January 25: a dozen riders ranging from a former Air Force cycling champion to a 14-year-old student. Over the next week, they were welcomed at villages along the way by youth organisations holding signs and flowers, slept in monasteries and churches, and passed out literature about the benefits

of cycling and the importance of sustainable development. On January 31, they arrived at Kilometer 0+000.

The group’s “green” orientation extends beyond the bikes to other environmental and social issues. The trip to Dawei was planned in part to raise awareness about the economic zone. “When I reached here and I listened to the villagers, it seems they’re really worried about relocation: they worry about their livelihoods... they worry about their lives,” said ride organiser Ko Thet Nai.

The night after their arrival at the SEZ, the Green Bike group slept at a monastery in Ma Yin Gyi village as guests of the head monk, U Aw Ba Tha. The monk is one of the founding members of the Dawei Development Association (DDA), a grassroots activist group focused on sustainable development and property rights in the area. The Dawei SEZ is one of the group’s core concerns, and Ma Yin

‘The political reforms that have accompanied the recent economic liberalisation have released pent-up frustration over the project and allowed activists and residents to raise their voices in protest.’

Gyi is in the epicentre of the massive project.

More than 32,000 people live in the 204 square kilometres of the proposed development. Almost 4000 families in 21 villages face relocation from the port and industrial area.

“I have no hope to get anything from the company. My eyes fill with tears when I think of the future of this village,” the monk said in the monastery’s main hall. It is a view echoed by everyone I spoke to in the affected area.

Monks are at the forefront of the fight against the project. “If these monks did not stand with the people, all this would not be possible. ... The government, once they’ve seen the money, they don’t care,” Ko Thet Nai said.

U Su Kyi Tha, a monk from a nearby village monastery, added: “We don’t want compensation because the companies just take the land and give money. But villagers have no experience with money. They know how to grow crops but not [manage] money. To force farmers to work in factories is not positive development.”

At a gathering that night of more than 100 people from villages in the surrounding area, U Aw Ba Tha was

more optimistic, and more encouraging. “If you don’t like this, don’t be afraid,” he told the crowd. “We have our basic rights. You can stand up for your rights!”

The next day, in the village of Mu Do, the bike group stopped at a roadside teashop for a break. Mu Do is the first village scheduled for relocation – residents will have to leave next month – and the people we met were angry. U Thin Ladd, a villager and former military officer, was adamant that they would be worse off under the relocation plan. “The new houses are not good quality, not fit for human settlement. It’s not the way to run a democratic country, not listening to the people’s decisions,” he said. “The companies work with the government – they don’t care about the people. They think the people here are uneducated, so they can do what they want.”

His friend, U Aung Myint, broke in, adding: “In the new relocation site, there are no jobs! We are not sure what to do. Now we have crops. After we move – no land, no jobs. ... They give only one house per family. But we have extended families! Now there are 576 houses in the village, but we’re only going to get 343 houses. How can we manage?”

“The company said that we could get jobs on the construction. But we applied more than a month ago and have heard nothing. People from away get jobs, but locals don’t. They’re always asking for money to get jobs – there is corruption everywhere!”

This sort of outspokenness, unthinkable only a few years ago, is common inside the proposed SEZ. Most of the ire is aimed at the company in charge of the project, Italian-Thai Development, the largest construction company in Thailand.

A visit to the project’s relocation site in the village of Bawah showed why residents are upset. Hundreds of newly built houses stand in regular rows on sloping open ground. At first sight, the houses look quite modern: concrete pilings, cinderblock walls and metal roofs instead of the traditional wooden houses of the villages. The reality may be less impressive. “The relocation area is no good. The houses are bad quality. Twelve houses were damaged last night by the wind, one almost destroyed. And I have no hope that anything new will be better,” U Aw Ba Tha said earlier that day in Ma Yin Gyi.

Of the wrecked house, only the concrete frame remained. Next to the wreckage was a traditional wood and bamboo house with thatched roof. “I heard a strange sound, like thunder in the night. When I woke and looked, I saw that the new house had collapsed. A part of it hit my house,” said Su Kam, the owner of the wooden home. Above his head, the wooden eave was dented but intact. Despite living in the middle of 343 new concrete houses, Su



Top and above right: U Aw Ba Tha explains the Dawei Special Economic Zone project to residents of Ma Yin Gyi. Above left: A resident of Kha Lone Htar in a t-shirt that villagers made to show their opposition to a planned dam. Right: Members of Green Bike on the road between Yangon and Dawei. Far right: Members of Green Bike hand out leaflets to villagers during their ride from Yangon to Dawei. Pics: Marcus Rhinelander

Kam chose not to leave his traditional house “because my old house is better”, he said.

KO Ley Lwin from Ya Laing village is also a member of DDA and outspoken in his opposition to the project. Talking the morning after the meeting in Ma Yin Gyi, he said he first learned of the project when a friend read a description in a Thai newspaper. In 2008, a “feasibility study group” came to his house, and he asked a member of the group what they were doing. They said they were studying the proposed SEZ but did not know when it

would start. “That’s the first news I got from the company,” he said.

He is concerned about the impact of relocation on the people in the area. “When they move the villagers to another place, I think that there will be problems occurring ... within the villages and between the villagers and the government officers and the officers of the company.”

He said the country’s recent moves towards democracy had been critical for enabling residents to speak out. “After the changes, we have a small chance to organise, a small chance to move for our

rights. I want to say thank you for our government.” But for many villagers from the Dawei area “there is still a little fear, they have had bad experiences in the past under the old government.” And in the future? “I want to say that our villagers and our people are united. Unity is the strongest. If we have unity, we can decide our life and future ... Me? I will stay here until my last breath.”

Ten kilometres north of the SEZ, in a narrow canyon of black rock, a concrete survey marker by the side of the road shows the proposed location of a dam that would supply water to the zone. Above it, neatly written

Residents find their voice



He said tourism potentially offered an alternative development strategy. "We will warmly welcome anyone who comes to the village. If visitors come to the village, we can take them to many beautiful places."

After lunch, villagers took a group of visiting activists up the valley to local waterfalls, some of the most impressive in Myanmar but virtually unknown outside the valley. In one tributary valley four cascades, the tallest several hundred feet high, poured down into deep pools of clear water. The Kah Lone Htar region clearly had the potential to become a major attraction if southern Myanmar opened up to tourism. The waterfall itself seems enough to ensure a steady supply of visitors.

"We villagers don't want the dam; we'd rather have tourism developed," said villager Ying Ngan, at the bottom of the falls. "If tourism comes, there will be many benefits to the village."

"Italian-Thai says they will make the dam, but we don't agree; we want to protect our land and our farms ... I don't want to stop the whole project, I want them to build a dam away from people. A smaller project would be better."

IT appears the Myanmar government may be taking note of the scale of the opposition to the SEZ. At the monastery in Ma Yin Gyi, Ko Ley Lwin told the assembled crowd on January 31: "I've heard news that the project area will be reduced more and more. But Thailand doesn't admit that this is true."

Recent reports indicate that the Myanmar government wants to reduce the size of the zone from 204 square kilometers to 150. This downsizing, however, is unlikely to satisfy the villagers who would still have to relocate. A planned 3600-megawatt coal-fired power plant at the site was cancelled after opposition from environmental groups but a huge 1040-megawatt hydropower dam on the pristine Tanintharyi River could be built instead, with significant consequences for the region's biodiversity and fishing industry.

The government has also announced that it intends to broaden the project to make it less reliant on Italian-Thai Development and it seems Japanese firms will likely be involved. With more clarity about the foreign investment environment, industrial investors are starting to look closely at the site; the Green Bike visit to the zone was followed closely by two groups of potential Thai investors comprising more than 150 people from several dozen corporations.

Most disturbingly for the villagers, at a speech in Dawei town hall on January 28, Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement U Phone Swe railed against citizen activists like those opposing the

SEZ. A Dawei resident who attended the meeting said the minister called on people to form "civil military groups to defeat the opposition to the project", adding: "Now we see the enemy! The purpose of these militias is to defeat the enemy!" It was unclear exactly what this would entail, but within the SEZ this news was greeted with alarm.

At the meeting at Ma Yin Gyi monastery, one man said: "I'm from Paradat village. They have a list with 30 names of villagers for the militia. They said that my name was on the list."

But U Aw Ba Tha said the militia proposal was "designed to make the villagers fight with each other".

"Nobody should be afraid. We have our basic rights ... If we cooperate and are strong, even the president cannot make us move."

U Pyin Nyar Wun Tha had similar advice. "We have heard that the authorities

'They should do the project in a way that is less harmful to the environment. This village has many natural resources. They should build the dam in a different place.'

may make militias but we don't worry. If the authorities bring militias to the area, we don't care because we have to protect our village," he said. "The authorities have to do what they think is right, but we also have to do what we think is right."

Just a few miles from where the ride ended in Dawei, Green Bike organiser Ko Thet Nai relaxed on Maungmakan beach. "We used to live here in a traditional way; our environment and our people were very harmonious and sustainable. But when we follow 'modernisation', a lot of problems happen because people don't care about our cultural values, people don't care about our local wisdom, they just blindly follow modernity. Which is really, really dangerous for us," he said.

"As for the emphasis on big industrial zones, maybe it can be a benefit for the short term; it cannot be a benefit for the long term. And then we can see who will win. For me, when I came here and talked to the villagers, definitely the villagers lose."

Despite the scale of the Dawei project and its apparent high-level support, he is guardedly optimistic. "I foresee the civil society here is strong enough to fight against whatever they want and for whatever they want."



in white paint, a message reads "NO DAM."

The idyllic valley of Kah Lone Htar is an example of the conflict between large-scale industrial development and the "sustainable development" advocated by many residents and civil society activists. The village of Kah Lone Htar is technically outside the zone and its compensation mechanism but it would be completely submerged by a reservoir supplying water to the industrial zone, and its residents appear united – and organised – in their opposition.

A village of 182 families and about 1000 people, it

sits in a wide valley covered with betel nut and cashew plantations. Like many in this area, the residents of Kah Lone Htar consider themselves well-off, and their well-built houses and new motorbikes testify to their prosperity. As in Ma Yin Gyi, the opposition movement has been led by the village's most senior monk, U Pyin Nyar Wun Tha.

"The community thinks that if they move, they'll face problems, so they have to protest. We agreed not to sign the agreements because we have to protect our village. Just like we'd protect our nation," U Pyin Nyar Wun Tha said.

As the villagers prepared to welcome the Green Bike riders – its youth group was outfitted in green T-shirts reading "no dam, no relocation" in English and Burmese – U Pyin Nyar Wun Tha talked about his work. "The village has four committees; together we organise to educate the villagers about the problems we're facing. To do this is approved by Buddhist teachings. Some people say that this is not a proper role for monks. But the Buddha says that we have to benefit the society. I have to work according to the Buddha's teachings."

Asked whether the village

should be sacrificed for the success of the project, he replied: "Some people say, 'The project can generate much profit. This means that we must move one village.' I know that many big projects have few benefits for the local communities. ... But this village is very self-sufficient, with enough money from our plantations, fields and gardens: we don't need anything from the company. Businessmen see only their own profits."

"They should do the project in a way that is less harmful to the environment. This village has many natural resources. They should build the dam in a different place."

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Briefs

Air KBZ gets new aircraft with Danish financing

DOMESTIC airline Air KBZ has added a new aircraft to its fleet with financing from a Danish firm. On February 11 the ATR72-600 plane was officially handed over to the airline by its manufacturers, the French company ATR.

The handover ceremony in Toulouse, France, was attended by senior management from Air KBZ, ATR and Nordic Aviation Capital (NAC), a Danish finance and leasing company that financed the transaction. NAC has also entered into an agreement with Air KBZ for a second ATR 72-600 aircraft to be delivered in June.

The 68-seater plane is the airline's fifth, and will be used to expand existing routes and add new destinations, including Bhamo and Putao in Kachin State, in March. The airline also says it plans to fly to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.

"Myanmar is quickly becoming an important business centre in the Southeast Asian region. We look forward to doing more business together in the future," said Mr Mats Ericson, head of sales for Asia at NAC.

"We are pleased to welcome the new ATR 72-600 to our existing young fleet," added Air KBZ deputy managing director U Khin Maung Myint. - *Yu Yu Maw*

Ayeyarwady researchers invites young people

YOUNG people with a taste for environmental or development-related work have been invited to join the Ayeyarwady Basin Research Organisation.

Dr Khin Ni Ni Thein, founder and patron of the organisation, issued the invitation at the group's first public consultative meeting, held in Yangon last week.

She said the Ayeyarwady Basin Research Organisation was a non-governmental organisation formed in May 2012, whose members were expert in water, development and environmental matters.

The organisation intends to conduct research on social and natural science-related issues concerning the river and Dr Khin Ni Ni Thein invited young people interested in these topics to join.

"One of our main objectives is to educate the younger generation in how to conduct research and present their findings honestly to the public. We will support those young people with technical assistance or help in finding funding for their research," she said.

Those interested can call 09-511-880 and 09-4315-4667. - *Aye Sapay Phyu*

Correction

The article "MMC suspends doctor for five years over 2010 death", published in the February 11-17 edition (No 665) of *The Myanmar Times*, incorrectly stated the doctor's licence had been revoked for medical negligence. The Myanmar Medical Council notice stated: "The medical licence was revoked due to miscalculation of due date [and] wrong decision to make caesarian operation."

The article also said the licence was revoked in late January but *The Myanmar Times* has since been informed the revocation occurred on June 1, 2012. The MMC's president confirmed the revocation in late January but refused to provide any further details. We regret the error.

Accor lines up Max Myanmar hotel deal

Companies are in talks over Pyay Tower becoming a Novotel Hotel

By Zaw Win Than

FRENCH hotel chain Accor is negotiating to partner with Max Myanmar to open a Novotel Hotel in Yangon, a spokesperson for the Myanmar conglomerate said last week.

The proposed hotel will be established in a Max Myanmar property known as Pyay Tower on Pyay Road. Max Myanmar Hotel Group project manager U Bo Chan Tun said the proposed hotel will have 366 rooms, including 159 rooms in 14-storey Tower A and 207 rooms in 16-storey Tower B.

"The building is owned by Max Myanmar Group but we are now in negotiations for the operational management of the hotel to be handled by Accor Hospitality. The name of this hotel will be Novotel Hotel (Yangon)," he told *The Myanmar Times*.

The hotel will feature a presidential suite, penthouse, ball room, meeting room, conference rooms, café, wine bar, French restaurant, swimming pool, fitness centre, spa and tennis court.

He said the hotel will help to alleviate the shortage of hotel rooms in Yangon and also create job opportunities.

"After finishing this hotel project, I hope we will be able to recruit more than 600 staff," he said. "Developing a big hotel with many rooms like this will help to meet demand for hotel rooms."

The building structure was designed by Singapore-based International Interior Design Association (IIDA), while Vietnam-based AA Corporation has been engaged for the interior design, he said.

Pyay Tower was formerly a joint project between four construction companies - National Development Companies Group, ACE, A1 and Wah Wah Win - and the



Pyay Tower on Pyay Road in Kamaryut township. The four original private investors sold their stake in the project to Max Myanmar in 2009-10. Pic: Aye Zaw Myo

government. Construction started in 2001 but quickly stalled because of financial problems and Max Myanmar acquired the 60 percent privately held stake in 2009-10.

Earlier this month, *Bangkok Post* reported that the world's second-largest hotel chain, Best Western, will open its first Myanmar property in 2013.

The hotel chain is looking at locations in Yangon and Mandalay,

the report said.

Best Western, which manages more than 4000 properties worldwide, has been discussing franchising and ownership options of the hotels in Myanmar with potential investors, Mr Glenn de Souza, Bangkok-based vice president of international operations for Asia and the Middle East at Best Western, was quoted as saying.

MP calls for recycling plant at Inle Lake to resolve trash problem

By Pyae Thet Phyo

A PLAN to rescue Inle Lake from a mountain of rubbish by building a recycling factory is being considered. Pyithu Hluttaw representative U Win Swe is pressing for the factory in order to help preserve the environment around the tourist attraction, which is in southern Shan State.

Rubbish from more than 20 villages on the lake is collected every five days and dumped in a temporary pile beside Say Kone Crematorium in Nan Pan.

"About 500 viss (one viss equals 1.6 kg or 3.6 lbs) of rubbish is collected every five days from Thar Lay and Oo Kone villages alone," said U Win Swe, who represents Nyaungshwe.

Now the "temporary" garbage mountain is growing. U Win Swe

says local residents are finding other ways of disposing of their household waste, such as burying it, throwing it in the lake or burning it.

Agreeing to consider the proposal, Deputy Minister for Industry U Thein Aung said there were currently no plans to build a factory, and a feasibility study would be needed first. He added that detailed assessments would take place, and that any eventual construction would have to be carried out by experts.

The deputy minister said the factory would be located far from residential areas and cultural heritage sites and would be equipped with technology to minimise any ill-effects on the environment. Its operation would be subjected to careful monitoring, he said.

- *Translated by Zar Zar Soe*

Elderly former scouts to meet up

By Cherry Thein

FORMER boy scouts, many of them now in their 80s and 90s, are being sought to help train and inspire youngsters entering the scouting movement.

Long banned in Myanmar, scouting is now back on the curriculum so that young people can learn leadership skills, team spirit and morality, the Ministry of Education says.

The gathering of senior scouts will be held at 10am on February 23 at Diamond Jubilee Hall at Yangon University in Kamaryut township.

U Tin Nyo, a consultant for inclusive education in the education ministry, told *The Myanmar Times* that the sharing of senior scouts' experiences would be helpful for the future development of scouting in Myanmar.

"It will be good to see the scouts back, and I look forward to seeing the scout movement develop in the future," he said. "We are trying to contact all scouts throughout the country. They are in their 80s and 90s, but they are very excited about the meeting."

Scouts can be found in 196 countries, but the movement has been banned in six countries including, until recently, Myanmar, he said.

The program resumed at high schools in 18 townships in December 2012, with 100 grade-seven participants in each township. The trainer-teachers took a short scouting course in Nay Pyi Taw in November prior to the program launch.



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Briefs

Visa on arrival expanded at Mandalay airport

CITIZENS of another 22 countries became eligible for a visa on arrival at Mandalay International Airport from February 1, an official said.

Most of the newly eligible countries are in Europe, assistant director of the Immigration and National Registration Department U Than Win said.

"So far citizens of 48 countries are eligible for visa on arrival. This will be useful for eligible travellers who don't have time to apply for a visa from an embassy," U Than Win said.

Three types of visa are offered: business, entry and transit, costing U\$50, \$40 and \$20 respectively.

"The duration of a business visa is 70 days, while entry visas for seminars, meetings and workshops are valid for 28 days," he said.

Visa on arrival was introduced at Mandalay International Airport on November 1, 2012.

However, just 76 visitors had received a business, entry or transit visa on arrival to February 10. Another 158 tourists have been issued a visa on arrival under a different program that requires them to get permission from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. — *Aung Ye Thwin*

Indian consulate to host Manipur art show

THE consulate general of India in Mandalay will hold a cultural exhibition from February 20 to 24 at the Mandalay National Theatre, consul general Dr Madan Mohan Sethi said last week.

The event is being held for the first time and will showcase items from the Manipur Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation under India's Ministry of Textiles.

"Twenty-five handicraft artists from India and five from Myanmar will take part," he said.

He said Mandalay was a more suitable location for the event than Yangon because of its history as a cultural capital and royal past. It is also closer to Manipur; the remote Indian state borders Sagaing Region.

"The exhibition is not to sell anything; it is just to showcase our arts, including bamboo products and handmade textiles. These products have also been shown in Japan and Bangkok and we will continue to try improve the lives of the artists," he said.

He said India wanted to help promote Myanmar as a tourist destination and this would open up Myanmar handicrafts from Bagan and Mandalay to new markets.

"There will be bus services between Mandalay and Manipur coming soon" and this will make it easier for tourists from India to visit, he said. — *Khin Su Wai*



Police enforce a ban on motorcycles travelling on the 35th Street overpass in Mandalay on December 20, 2011, the day that the ban came into effect. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw

New flyover to be built in Mandalay

By Than Naing Soe and Si Thu Lwin

MANDALAY is to get a new overpass on 34th Street between 78th and 79th streets, a Mandalay City Development Committee official said last week.

The overpass will cross the north-south train line, the official said.

"The area has three train tracks where trains shunt so we plan to construct a flyover there. But we will need to negotiate with the Railway Department as well," he said.

"We will draw potential designs for the overpass after those negotiations. The project is just in the early planning stages but we expect to start construction in the [2013-14] financial year," the official said.

He said the new overpass will be wider than the one on 35th Street that also crosses the train lines.

The three existing overpasses that link districts of the city to the east and west of the train lines are major chokepoints and to ease congestion MCDC has banned motorcycles from the bridges on 35th and 42nd streets.

The new bridge will be open to motorcycle traffic, the official said.

"There are too few connections between streets that run east-west. Mandalay palace blocks east-west traffic between 12th and 26th streets, while the railway line blocks from 26th to 35th streets, and the military and university compounds block from 37th to Theit Pan streets," said Ko Aye Min Tun from Maha Aung Myay township.

"As a result, traffic is always congested at the few streets where you can travel east-west."

— *Translated by Zar Zar Soe*

NUP preparing for 2015

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

THEY may have already been written off by most observers, but the National Unity Party's leaders say they are not giving up on the 2015 general election.

Joint general secretary U Khin Maung Gyi, 83, said at a ceremony to mark Union Day on February 11 that the party is devising a new campaign strategy ahead of the next election.

He said the party "knew what to do" based on its experience in 2010, when it fielded 995 candidates and one 61 seats. The party lost all 23 seats it contested in the 2012 by-elections.

"We're preparing and targeting which places to contest and who will be potential [candidates] in the upcoming election," he said.

"We're also preparing our campaign strategy for campaign managers and

potential representatives."

The NUP is ostensibly only 24 years old, but it traces its roots to U Ne Win's Burma Socialist Program Party, founded in 1962. The party's ageing cadres appear reluctant to give up leadership positions in the party, despite the obvious need for new blood.

Central Executive Committee member U Han Shwe said the party's membership had decreased from 750,000 before the 2010 general election to 500,000 after the 2012 by-elections.

"The latest figures show a decrease but we still have to re-collect lists from Kachin and Rakhine states, as well as 17 townships in Shan State," he said, adding that the process would be completed by the middle of year.

He did not respond when asked about the possible reasons for the sharp decline.

U Khin Maung Gyi said the party adhered to its principles, even if that

meant not being as popular as some of its rivals.

"We don't try to be popular. We work according to our ways," he said.

"We know that we older people should not work in higher positions and that this is the time for younger leadership ... so we would like to hand over to young people. We will try to unearth younger leaders soon," he said.

U Khin Maung Gyi said the NUP agreed with other parties on the need to amend the constitution but said the sections the party wants to amend might be different from other groups.

"We mostly just focus on economic reform so we'll support changes to the constitution that encourage economic reform," U Khin Maung Gyi said.

He said the party also agreed with calls for the government to practise "real federalism" in Myanmar.

Gandamar Garden takes out Mayor's Cup

GANDAMAR Garden won the 11th Mandalay Mayor's Cup last week for its array of flowers, fruit and vegetables at a produce show at Mandalay's Kandawgyi Garden.

Of the 650 competitors in the competition, Gandamar from Mandalay won three first prizes, two second prizes, three third prizes and four consolation prizes. The cup was awarded to Gandamar on February 12 based

on its total haul.

"This is the first time I've won the cup. In last year's competition, I just won some second and third prizes and so missed out on the big prize. The prizemoney is not bad but I just competed because I enjoy gardening," said U Khin Maung Htay from Gandamar Garden.

Each winner in the 23 categories received K150,000, while second place-getters received K100,000

and third place K70,000. Consolation prize recipients were awarded K30,000 each.

"I think last year's winning flowers and fruits were more beautiful than this year but anyway I'm pleased that we have an event like this to show off our best produce," said visitor Ko Aung Ko Zaw, 25.

The show continues until February 18. — *Phyo Wai Kyaw and Than Naing Soe*



An attendant points to a prize-winning calabash on February 12. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw

No buried Spitfires in Myanmar, says dig sponsor

YANGON — The sponsor of a British-led team hunting for dozens of rare World War II Spitfires said to have been buried in Myanmar has abandoned the search, saying stories of the stashed planes are merely "legend".

Rumours that dozens of the iconic single-seat aircraft were buried in 1945 by Britain, the former colonial power in what was then Burma, had excited military history enthusiasts, but surveys at Yangon airport in Mingalardon township have failed to bear fruit.

The project backer, online game company Wargaming, said the team "now believes, based on clear documentary evidence, as well as the evidence from the fieldwork, that no Spitfires were delivered in crates and buried at RAF Mingalardon during 1945 and 1946".

Lead archaeologist Andy Brockman said the investigation into the stories of buried Spitfires was undertaken in the spirit of US television forensic police series "CSI" (Crime Scene Investigation).

"We followed the clues in the documents, period maps, pictures and air photographs; we talked to surviving witnesses, and visited the 'crime scene' in order to turn our study in the archives into facts on the ground," he said.

"As a result we believe that the legend of the buried Spitfires of Burma is just that: a captivating legend about a beautiful and iconic aircraft."

In a statement released late on February 15, Wargaming said the search for Spitfires in Myanmar was rooted in persistent rumours that began among servicemen in "the bars and canteens of Southeast Asia" as early as 1946.

It added that no surviving witnesses had actually seen planes being buried and that its research in British archives had failed to produce any evidence of the arrival of the aircraft in Myanmar in the latter months of the war.

But a local businessman involved in the project, U Htoo Htoo Zaw, on February 16 vowed to continue the planned digs in the northern city of Myitkyina and Yangon airport, signalling a split within the team.

"We haven't started any digging yet. So how can we say for sure whether there are Spitfires or not?" he said.

It was unclear to what extent the excavations would continue and project leader David Cundall — a farmer and aircraft enthusiast who has spent around 17 years chasing the Spitfires — was not immediately reachable for comment. — *AFP*



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Foreign auto investments announced

By Aye Thidar Kyaw

JAPANESE car maker Suzuki's decision to resume vehicle production in Myanmar in May is just one of the changes spurred by the enactment of laws and regulations governing foreign investment on January 31, industry sources say.

Following the opening of its auto spares showroom on Pyay Road on February 2, Nissan is also thought likely to set up an assembly factory in Myanmar.

In addition, according to Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA) website, Jardine Cycle & Carriage of Singapore will cooperate with Automobile Century in Myanmar in providing automobile services in Yangon.

"Suzuki will resume production in Myanmar, and Nissan is likely to come in for manufacturing, but I don't think any other companies will come," said senior economist Dr Maung Aung, commenting on the meeting on February 7 between Myanmar officials and the Japanese business lobby Nippon Keidanren.

Mr Masaki Takahara, executive managing director of the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) in Yangon, said Japanese companies were most likely to be involved in labour-intensive light manufacturing industry. "After the development of the Thilawa Special Economic Zone, I think high value-added manufacturing like the automobile industry can participate in manufacturing," he said.

Labour costs in Myanmar are the lowest in Asia, and labour quality high, he added. Industries that did not need significant electricity supply, such as the garment industry, could also prosper here.

"More and more Japanese offshore software development and programming companies are participating in Myanmar to take advantage of the low-cost, high-skilled labour," he said.

The lure of an untapped consumer market of 60 million is also attractive to foreign investors despite restrictions in the form of rules and regulations governing investment, he said.

The recent influx of late model second-hand vehicles suggests that the short-term impact of Suzuki's resumption of production will be low. "People will surely be interested in new cars, but it will not affect the local market much, I think, because initial production will be only about 100 a month, mostly trucks," said one commerce official.



The tendering process for four mobile telecommunications licences is continuing, despite the resignation of former Minister for Communications and Information on January 16. Pic: Yadanar

SingTel shoots for mobile access

By Sharon Chen and Kyaw Thu

SINGAPORE - Singapore Telecommunications Ltd, Southeast Asia's biggest phone company, wants to focus on wireless services in Myanmar as it vies for the right to operate in one of the world's last untapped mobile markets.

SingTel sent in its expression of interest for a phone licence in the nation last month and is awaiting further details on the bidding process and terms of the permit, chief executive officer Chua Sock Koong said in a Bloomberg Television interview on February 13.

"Looking at the experience in other emerging markets, the mobile solution appears to be a more cost effective, a faster solution to provide communications infrastructure to the masses, particularly in the rural areas, very quickly," she said. "While the market potential is attractive, we would need to understand what the terms of the licence issuance would be."

SingTel, which owns stakes in the biggest mobile-phone companies in Asian emerging markets including Thailand,

Indonesia and India, is seeking a foothold in a nation where only 9 percent of the country's 64 million people have handsets. The nation's fixed-line penetration rate is about 1pc, the government said last month.

Myanmar wants to boost telecommunications coverage to as much as 80pc of the country by 2016, the government said last month. That is up from 5.44 million mobile-phone subscribers by December. In SingTel's home base in Singapore, there are more subscriptions than people.

"The growth is going to be quite exponential, looking at how Asians use mobile phones," said Carey Wong, a Singapore-based analyst at OCBC Investment Research Pte. "The challenge is consumer education. Initial sales won't be great but once it takes off, it's a developing market for them."

Still, SingTel faces competition for the two Myanmar licences the government plans to award by June. Malaysia's Axiata Group Bhd, Singapore's ST Telemedia Pte and Norway's Telenor ASA were among phone operators that indicated their interest in the licences.

For mobile operators,

developing a network in Myanmar would require "almost building from scratch" with base stations and other infrastructure, said Sachin Gupta, a Singapore-based senior analyst at Nomura Holdings Inc. Gupta's team was ranked first for telecommunications research in Asia by Institutional Investor last year.

SingTel said on February 13 that third-quarter profit fell 8.3pc on charges from its Australia and Philippine businesses, as well as a stronger Singapore dollar that eroded earnings from its regional operations.

The company's shares fell 2.8pc to S\$3.50 on February 13 at the close in Singapore, the biggest decline in almost five months. That pared the gain in the past year to 13pc, compared with the 10pc increase in Singapore's benchmark Straits Times Index.

"Singapore is already a mature market, Australia is even more so," Wong at OCBC said. "If they can get into an untapped market like Myanmar - that will do wonders."

For much of the past decade, mobile phones have been out of reach for most Myanmar consumers. When first

introduced in 2001, the cost of activating a phone using the global system for mobile communications standard, or GSM, cost about K4.5 million (US\$5221). The price has fallen to about K200,000 for a GSM chip, according to prices at phone vendors in Yangon.

U Kyaw Min Tun, who earns about K250,000 a month driving a taxi in Yangon, said prices would have to fall to K50,000 before he could buy a mobile phone for his wife. The father of three, who bought a phone last year when chip activation prices were reduced, said the government should earn more from usage fees rather than on the price of the chip to make cellular phones more affordable.

For SingTel's Chua, 55, venturing into Myanmar would add to her overseas footprint that includes Australia's second-biggest phone company and stakes in six mobile operators.

"Myanmar is a market that a lot of operators are looking at," she said. There is "certainly a lot of potential. How attractive an investment in the telecoms industry is, would depend on, to a large extent, the regulatory environment." - Bloomberg

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US trade event to be held in late Feb

THE Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry will host a conference exploring relations with the United States on February 25, it was announced last week.

The program, "US-Myanmar Economic Relations: The Path Forward", will be held at UMFCCI's office tower in Lanmadaw township, a UMFCCI press release said.

Minister of the President's Office and chairman of the Myanmar Investment Commission U Soe Thein, as well as UMFCCI president U Win Aung and Jose Fernandez, US Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs will each address the event.

The event is being supported by the US Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, whose mission is to promote economic security and prosperity in the US and abroad. The organisation's work lies at the centre of economic prosperity and national security, its website says.

Officials will discuss trade and investment, compliance and guidelines for US companies doing business in Myanmar.

- Aye Thidar Kyaw



Employees of a telephone shop on Bo Aung Kyaw Street in downtown Yangon show a product to customers. Pic: Boothee

Phone sales decline as SIMs dry up

By Myat Nyein Aye and Myat May Zin

MOBILE phone sales are down as the supply of SIM cards has dried up following the shock resignation of the former minister for telecommunications on

January 16, shop owners in Yangon said last week.

"Most of our customers buy a handset and SIM card together but there are no SIMs available, so people are buying fewer phones," said Ko Maung Maung, owner of ALIF phone shop in Yangon's Pabedan township.

He added that the phone and SIM sales are always linked. "When we've sold all our SIM cards, we only sell a maximum of five or six more handsets. But when we have SIM cards we easily sell 10 or more phones," he said.

The number of mobile phone shops in Yangon has increased significantly in the past three years as the

prices of SIM cards have been reduced in steps, and the supply has become more regular. Previously, SIM cards were sold through auctions.

But the supply has dried up since the end of 2012 and shops are surviving on handset and accessory sales, as well as service charges, said U Nay Dawn Win, owner of Hello Thargyi mobile shop in Thaketa township.

"There are few buyers, except for those people who always want the latest model," he said. "Normally people buy the cheapest handsets they can find at about K30,000," he said.

"Before January, small

shop owners would sell SIMs with incentives, such as by installment plans with handsets. Then, even shops were selling three to five handsets a day, while big shops could sell up to 20," he said.

"But since mid-January, when the supply of SIMs was reduced, handset sales have fallen a lot," he added.

A shop owner in Latha township said sales ramped up in January 2010 when the supply of SIM cards increased, beginning with CDMA 800MHz connections that sold for K500,000 each. GSM SIMs at the same price followed in February 2011.

Prices were lowered in April 2012, with the price of WCDMA and GSM chips reduced to K250,000 and K200,000 respectively.

The increased supply of SIMs also boosted handset sales, the shop owner said.

"Ever since the supply of SIM cards increased we've been selling a lot more handsets but in the past few weeks it's been difficult to find SIMs," he said.

Daw Mon Mon Aye, the marketing manager of J phone shop in Kyauktada township, said shop owners were hopeful that the supply of SIM cards would increase again soon.

"Consumers are waiting for lower priced SIMs and are not buying handsets. Now, our handsets supply faced with so bad.

"We expect that if cheaper SIMs are issued soon we'll see sales quickly increase again," she told *The Myanmar Times*.

She added that the company had responded to the release of K200,000 SIM cards by opening a number of small retail shops, in addition to its larger wholesale outlets.

Ko Maung Maung said Samsung handsets are the most popular with buyers, with Huawei units in second

place.

"Samsung is easily the most popular brand of handset but young people also like Huawei phones because they work well with the internet. Both have large screens and are relatively inexpensive," he said.

"Apple iPhones are also popular but only among rich people," he said.

Phone user Ma Yu Yu from Mayangone township said: "I have no plan to buy a handset but I'd like to upgrade my phone to the latest model if possible."

"In others countries, consumers can upgrade their handsets by paying a little extra money every month. From my point of view, if local handset shops offered a similar service the market would be more active and they wouldn't need to wait for new SIM cards to be released," she said.

Samsung's best selling model, its Galaxy Note 2 is retailing for about K525,000, while the Note is about K410,000, Samsung S3 handsets are selling for about K460,000. Huawei's W895 is K130,000, while its U8833 is K110,000 and the Ascend P1 is K265,000, said Ko Maung Maung.

Most phones in use in Myanmar are imported from China through border trade, although some are shipped through normal trade from Singapore.

"Thai handsets don't work here," said U Zaw Tun, the marketing manager of 357 Wholesale mobile handset shop on Bo Aung Kyaw Street.

"Chinese handsets are the best option for many buyers because they are cheap and work well," he said.

"Young people seem to like the Chinese-made touchphones because they are quite cheap at about K100,000 and can be used to play video games or perform other applications."

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Phone: 372416 Dated: 18th February, 2013

CIF changes put small cars back in charge

By Myat May Zin

DEMAND for small-engine passenger cars is running strong in the wake of changes in December to the cost, insurance and freight valuations used to tax imported vehicles.

Consumers are instead looking to cars with sub-1350 cubic centimetre engines made from 2007 onward that do not require an import permit, use less fuel and are cheaper to buy, say car traders.

Vehicles affected by the December import changes require an import permit, earned by submitting an older vehicle for scrapping, which change hands for about K9 million. The tax levied on

imported cars averages about K5 million, while shipping costs from K1.5 million to K2 million, importers say. All told, eligible vehicles – made from 1996-2007 – cost at least K18 million, while a smaller car can be bought from car lots in Yangon for K10 million, said traders from Hantharwaddy car market.

Dr Soe Tun, owner of the Farmer car showroom on Saya San Road, said: “Everybody wants to buy later model cars even when the prices are the same. And even if we can get an automobile shipped for free from Japan, we can’t sell it for less than K16 million.”

But Myanmar Automobile Industries Association central executive committee member U Aung Naing Tun said he



Car traders say recent changes to the cost, insurance and freight valuations used to tax imported vehicles have boosted demand for smaller cars. Pic: Yadanar

does not believe the trend is universal.

“More late-model luxury cars are being imported but

late model trucks are not,” he said. “Early model trucks, made in 2000 or 2001 are being imported in large

numbers because they’re cheap and people can afford them.”

But registration discrepancies have led to problems in port, Dr Soe Tun said.

“Automobiles produced in October, November and December of 2012 are registered as 2013 models – one year up. That’s why some imported automobiles are one year down,” said Dr Soe Tun.

In previous years port authorities have not allowed models with non matching numbers to be released, but the government has eased some restrictions: models one year too old can be released with payment of half the accessories value, while models that are two

years down can be released with the same payment plus a fine and port fees, said importers.

Last month, importers and some car showroom owners of the Myanmar Automobile Industries Association held a press conference over 22 impounded vehicles in Yangon Port.

“Seven vehicles have already been taken out from port, but there are still five automobiles that are two years down. Some of them are already on the port auction list because they have exceeded 60 days in port. Owners need to protest against their placement on the auction list and have to apply again with Customs for taking them out of port,” said U Aung Naing Tun.

Malaysia issues invite for halal showcase

THE Malaysian government is inviting Myanmar companies to participate in a trade fair for halal goods. The exhibition, which takes place in Kuala Lumpur, from April 1 to 4, will showcase foodstuffs and food ingredients, as well as cosmetic and pharmaceutical products.

The Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) is an annual trade exhibition for goods produced according to halal principles. MIHAS is hosted by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and organised by Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE).

“Halal products are not only for Muslims, but for all. Halal refers to wholesome, clean and hygienically prepared products,” said Dr Faisal Muhamad, Malaysia’s ambassador to Myanmar. In Malaysia, halal products are monitored by the Prime

Minister’s department and endorsed with a special logo. Halal foods are allowed under Islamic dietary guidelines.

“In Myanmar, some Malaysian food products, which are 90 percent halal, have already made inroads. I don’t see huge challenges to introduce halal-certified products to the Myanmar market. I’m confident there will be a lot of customers for halal products in Myanmar,” said Dr Muhamad.

“Serious” Myanmar buyers are being offered three nights’ free accommodation, airport transfer, local transportation, arrangements for all meetings and a visit to the MATRADE permanent exhibition centre.

“Buyers can contact MATRADE at the Malaysian Embassy in Yangon,” said Mr M T Rajah, marketing representative of MATRADE.

– Myat May Zin

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- Senior Policy Advisor – Education

The duty statements can be obtained from the Australian Embassy, 88 Strand Road, Yangon, Myanmar, or at the Australian Embassy website: <http://www.burma.embassy.gov.au/rang/aboutus.html>

Closing date for the applications will be 4PM (Yangon time) 28 February 2013.



Notorious fraudster Bernard Madoff walks down Lexington Ave to his apartment in December, 2008. In June 2009, Madoff was sentenced to 150 years in prison for defrauding investors of billions of dollars. Pic: AFP

Why we need corporate governance

Opinion by Dr Min Thu Maung

I RECENTLY attended a so-called "Talk Program" in Yangon given by a senior Myanmar senior academic. The lecture gave a brief overview of the nature of capital markets, public corporations and corporate governance. Given that the country is embarking on a wide range of economic and financial reforms, the timing could not have been more appropriate. The turnout was large and the audience included government officials, business professionals and the public.

The lecture was inspiring and covered a wide range of issues but the most interesting part was a section on corporate governance, which received considerable interest from the audience. Given that Myanmar will be opening its first stock exchange in 2015, the particular focus was on how to effectively govern the listed corporations. The lecture drew mostly on the UK-related corporate governance principals derived from the 1992 Cadbury report. The speaker addressed a wide range of governance issues and drew on some well-known cases from the Western corporations.

The most interesting part of the entire lecture was a question asked by a member of the audience, which was as follows: Given the risky nature of investment in equity markets, would it not be better for ordinary people to keep their money in savings accounts that carry annual interest of 8 percent?

A follow-up question asked what assurances the Myanmar Stock Exchange Centre (MSEC) would provide to investors. It is well known in financial economics

literature that there is a trade-off between risk and return. That is, investors seeking higher returns – as generally provided by equity markets – must accept higher risks.

However, the question was quickly dismissed.

An official from MSEC at the lecture promptly replied that the markets will determine the security prices. This was a perfectly legitimate answer. Theory underlying free markets dictates just that: prices of assets are freely determined by demand and supply. The response from the speaker was rather vague but the last sentence I heard was thought provoking: it would not be in the interest of the country if all investors were to adamantly stick to their 8pc interest savings accounts.

Although the question was somewhat misguided, it opened up a whole range of other questions that were directly related to the lecture. And the answers, while true to some extent, did not alleviate the concerns. While it is true that in free markets, the markets determine the prices of securities, a caveat is in order: free markets work only to the extent that they are also efficient. Most academics and the practitioners I know of will admit that markets are not as efficient as we would like them to be. I do not address this issue here not to prolong this article. In brief, all advanced countries have realised this issue and the governments have put rules and regulations in place to protect the investing public.

A more relevant question that no one from the audience asked was how the corporations – or the officials involved – would mitigate risks that are not inherently operational by nature. Although

all firms, at least in theory, strive to maximise profits, it is apparent that not all would be able to do so, and some would be liquidated if sustained losses occur. Although this occurrence could also be attributed to incompetence of the executives managing the firms, this could also happen due to reasons beyond managers' control. A more relevant question is what could be done to govern these corporations so that the executives act in shareholders' interests.

The separation of ownership and control symbolises the modern corporation. Generally, the providers of capital entrust their savings to corporations that are run by professional managers who may or not may not hold equity stakes in the firms they manage. Corporate governance deals with the ways in which suppliers of finance assure themselves of getting returns on their investment. Once they have parted with their funds, investors receive certificates of ownerships that by themselves are virtually worthless. Despite glossy prospectuses and repeated promises, there is little or no assurance that investors would receive anything back in return. After all, professional managers and executives manage daily operations and make important decisions. In theory, the providers of capital and managers would sign contracts that are complete in the sense that all possible contingencies have been conceived. Also, these contracts could be enforced in a court of law.

In reality, this kind of contracting is not possible and it is extremely costly to monitor the managers or enforce these contracts even in countries

with strong legal and financial systems. Thus managers, should they desire, almost always find ways to extract private benefits for themselves. These private benefits could include excessive compensation, consumption of perks (such as luxurious offices), providing misleading financial information and self-dealing. This conflict of interest between the providers of capital and the people who have this capital at their disposal, known as agency problem or the problem between the principals and the agents, has been a topic of intense study in financial economics.

Stories of professional managers and executives expropriating corporate resources and returning nothing to investors are too numerous to count. In the Russian oil industry, the executives sell deeply-discounted oil of the firms they manage to the firms they own on the side. Listed firms in China often misrepresent their financial statements: a forestry product firm from China was recently delisted from a Canadian exchange when evidence surfaced that it had been claiming non-existent assets on its balance sheets. In South Korea, groups of holding conglomerates known as *chaebol* have been known to sell their subsidiaries at discounts to the relatives of their founders.

This is part one of a two-part opinion article on corporate governance contributed to The Myanmar Times by Dr Min Thu Maung, an Assistant Professor of Finance at the Department of Finance and Management Science, the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. He received his PhD in Finance from the University of Alberta, Canada.

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6. Contracts Assistant (Database) (LICA3)	Yangon	National	28-Feb-2013

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VN's economic crisis takes toll on society

HANOI – From growing numbers of people with depression to families bankrupted by stock market investments, many are suffering in Vietnam's slow-burn economic crisis – and blame the communist regime for their woes.

After swapping Soviet-style central planning for free-market reforms in the mid 1980s, Vietnam became a regional poster-child with high economic growth rates, soaring foreign investment and a burgeoning middle class.

But with the economy in the doldrums and experts pointing to decades of economic mismanagement as the cause, many Vietnamese are saying that not only has their cash run out, but so has their trust in the government.

"This is the worst moment ever for my family... All our assets have vanished," said Nguyen Thi Huong, a 37-year-old who works in real estate and has seen her income dry up as the country's property market stagnates.

Huong's family were forced to sell their luxury apartment in Hanoi and move into a tiny, crumbling flat with her retired mother after losing all their savings



Vietnam's economic woes are affecting much of the population and many people are laying the blame on the authoritarian government for its mismanagement of the economy. Pic: AFP

in property investments and on the stock market.

Like many in Vietnam, Huong says she is convinced that "our leaders must be responsible for the dire state of the property market and the country's current economic crisis".

The authoritarian country's *doi moi* reform policies, launched in 1986,

sparked a period of strong growth and rising prosperity, which peaked in 2005 with record growth of 8.4 percent. The country joined the World Trade Organisation two years later.

"During that period, everybody was over-excited, dreaming that Vietnam would get rich overnight," said one Vietnamese analyst,

speaking on condition of anonymity.

"But the government made mistakes in macro-economic policy and the consequences have only just emerged. Now they are hitting everyone hard," he said.

A credit crisis and a sharp spike in bankruptcies, as well as stagnant stock and property markets, have hurt

the new middle class, and not just financially – more people are seeking treatment for stress and depression, state media reported.

"I have never seen so many patients coming for treatment of mental disorder due to losses in business as I did in 2012," doctor Le Hieu at the Ho Chi Minh City-based Mental Disease Hospital told VietnamNet news site.

For 46-year-old Tran Thanh Hung, who owns a furniture export workshop in Hanoi and who had to fire half his staff this year, the spike in mental health issues is understandable.

"Both the money and the trust of the people are now exhausted," he said.

Growth fell to a 13-year low of 5.03pc last year and the country of 90 million is "experiencing its worst ever economic crisis", said economist Nguyen Quang A.

From toxic loans paralysing the banking sector to falling foreign direct investment as regional rivals such as Indonesia and Myanmar become more attractive, the "long hidden disease" in the economy has surfaced.

"It's like a tumour that has just broken out and it is forcing the communist

party to address it," Quang A said.

The problems are myriad – a debt-laden state sector, a stock market that has more than halved in value from its peak in 2007, a stagnant property market and a banking system mired in toxic debts.

Experts say the Communist Party, which has run unified Vietnam since 1975 and tightly controls all political debate, seems unable to halt the paralysis of the economy.

More than 55,000 small- and medium-sized enterprises ceased operating last year according to official statistics, and unemployment is creeping up.

The problems hit home most around the time of the traditional Lunar New Year celebrations, which ended last week, with many Vietnamese companies abolishing or sharply reducing their annual worker bonuses.

Hanoi garment worker Tran Thi Hai was given 70 pairs of socks as a New Year bonus instead of the usual extra month's salary, according to state media.

"I have to sell them in the streets to earn a little cash – it is better than nothing," she said. – AFP

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Swiss banks ordered to hold extra capital as risk buffer amid boom

By Simone Meier, Zoe Schneeweiss and Elena Logutenkova

ZURICH – The Swiss government ordered banks to hold additional capital as a buffer against risks posed by the country's biggest property boom in two decades.

Banks will be forced to hold an extra 1 percent of risk-weighted assets linked to domestic residential mortgages, the government in Bern said in a statement on February 13. Lenders would have to add about 3 billion francs (US\$3.26 billion) to comply with the new rules, which will be enforced from September 30.

Property prices from Zurich to Geneva are surging as investors funnel money into one of Europe's most stable economies amid the sovereign debt crisis and record-low interest rates. While the government in July toughened rules on mortgage lending to avoid a repeat of a property collapse in the early 1990s, the Swiss National Bank asked for the buffer to be activated as the market continued to rise.

"We want to counter pre-emptively the possibly difficult consequences of a bubble," Swiss Finance Minister Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf said at a briefing on February 13. "If the situation stabilises, we can abolish it the same way we introduced it."

The SNB singled out the mortgage market as a significant risk in June. UBS AG and Credit Suisse, Switzerland's two largest banks, had combined outstanding mortgages of 252.2 billion francs (\$272.4 billion) at the end of November, up 4.8 percent from the end of 2011, SNB data shows. UBS did not immediately reply to a call for comment on the capital buffer on February 14.

Cantonal banks, largely owned by the regions, had 288.6 billion francs (\$311.7 billion) in mortgages at the end of November, up 4.7pc from the end of 2011. All banks, including cooperative-based Raiffeisen lenders, foreign and regional banks, had mortgage claims totalling



The Swiss government last week issued orders to its banks to hold extra capital to protect against a property boom. Pic: AFP

834.1 billion francs (\$900.8 billion) at the end of November, up 4.3pc from the end of 2011.

"There are several banks that don't have any problem" with the capital request, Widmer-Schlumpf said, without disclosing details. "It's a modest measure."

Under the current framework, the buffer can be activated to target specific segments of the credit market, with a maximum level of 2.5pc of total domestic risk-weighted assets of a bank. The buffer can be enforced on Swiss banks and subsidiaries of foreign banks operating in the country.

At UBS, Switzerland's largest bank, introducing the buffer will not change the lender's capital target, chief executive officer Sergio Ermotti said on February 5. The Zurich-based lender aims to boost its common equity ratio, a measure of financial strength, to 13pc in 2014 from 9.8pc at the end of December.

Credit Suisse chief

financial officer David Mathers said earlier this month that the bank expects to be able to absorb the introduction of a buffer within its overall target for lowering risk-weighted assets. Credit Suisse aims to lower Basel 3 risk-weighted assets for the group to less than 280 billion francs (\$302.4 billion) by the end of this year from 284 billion francs (\$306.7 billion) at the end of December. A Credit Suisse official declined to comment on the buffer on February 14.

The Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority said it advised the SNB not to implement the capital buffer now.

"Finma would have preferred to wait and see," the regulator said, adding that it already imposed higher capital requirements on individual banks. Finma wanted to see whether that step as well as more stringent self-regulation and the introduction of Basel III capital standards would bring about a

"sustained" reduction in mortgage growth.

The Swiss government toughened lending rules last year, forcing borrowers to supply at least 10pc of the value of the property from their own funds without using pension assets. Under the measures, mortgages will have to be paid down to two-thirds of the lending value within 20 years.

The SNB in September 2011 introduced a franc ceiling of 1.20 versus the euro to protect the economy and stop investors from piling into the currency, perceived as a haven in times of global turmoil. It kept borrowing costs at zero in December as part of efforts to defend the cap.

The UBS Swiss Real Estate Bubble Index remained in the so-called risk zone for a second quarter in the three months to December, said UBS AG. Swiss property values climbed 6.3pc in the 12 months through September, while they declined an average of 1.8pc in euro-

area countries, showed broker Knight Frank LLP's Global House Price Index.

Serge Gaillard, head of the government's finance administration, said at the briefing that the SNB did not have room to raise borrowing costs, calling the franc still "significantly overvalued".

"The buffer will already show an impact as banks set aside additional capital," Gaillard said. "The goal is to achieve more modest mortgage growth and to curb prices. It's up to the SNB to observe any overheating in the market – nobody is in a better situation to assess risks."

The collapse of Swiss real estate prices in the early 1990s tipped the economy into recession and caused the collapse of banks including Spar- and Leihkasse Thun and Solothurner Kantonalbank. Widmer-Schlumpf said on February 14 that there are "tendencies of bubbles in certain regions".

– Bloomberg News

India regulator freezes Sahara assets

MUMBAI – An Indian regulator has frozen the bank accounts of two companies of the giant Sahara group after it failed to obey a court order to repay billions of dollars illegally collected from investors.

Sahara, a household name in India and sponsor of the national cricket team, raised 240 billion rupees (US\$4.4 billion) in illegal bond sales to 30 million small investors between 2008 and 2011.

The Supreme Court said in August Sahara had "no right to collect" the funds from millions of investors without complying with regulatory provisions and ordered it to repay \$3 billion with 15 percent interest by the end of November.

However, the firm has still not paid up most of the cash ordered by the court, despite being given extra time to find the money in December.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said on its website late on February 13 it had ordered the freezing of bank accounts of tycoon Subrata Roy, Sahara's chief, and three other directors.

The assets of two Sahara group firms – Sahara India Real Estate Corp and Sahara Housing Investment Corp – were also to be seized.

But Sahara, which has millions of mainly poor, rural savers, said in a statement that "the total liability was unlikely to exceed 51 million rupees, which it has already paid". – AFP

Norway fund hits US market

OSLO – Norway's Government Pension Fund, the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, said on February 11 it had entered the US real estate market by investing US\$600 million in five office properties.

The fund bought a 49.9 percent stake in five office buildings in Washington, New York and Boston after forming a joint venture with the seller, TIAA-CREF, a pension fund.

The US fund will retain a 50.1pc holding and will be responsible for managing the properties, it said.

"As the world's largest real estate market, the US will be an important part of the fund's long-term property portfolio," said Karsten Kallevig, chief investment officer for real estate at the Norwegian central bank unit responsible for managing the fund's assets.

– AFP

US home prices increase in 88pc of cities, recovery broadens

By Prashant Gopal and John Gittelsohn

WASHINGTON – Prices for single-family homes climbed in almost 88 percent of US cities in the fourth quarter as the housing recovery broadened.

The median sales price increased from a year earlier in 133 of 152 metropolitan areas measured, the National Association of Realtors reported on February 11. In the third quarter, 120 areas had

gains.

An improving job market and low interest rates are driving up prices by fuelling demand for a tightening supply of listings. US home prices rose 8.3pc in December from a year earlier, the biggest jump since May 2006, Irvine, California-based CoreLogic reported February 5.

"The US housing recovery showed no signs of slowing in the final stages of 2012," Paul Diggle, property economist for Capital Economics in London, said in a note to clients after CoreLogic's

report was released. "And the early signs are that these gains will be extended throughout 2013 as the economy continues its recovery."

At the end of the fourth quarter, 1.82 million existing homes were available for sale, 22pc fewer than a year earlier, the Chicago-based Realtors group said.

The national median price for an existing single-family home was US\$178,900 in the fourth quarter, up 10pc from the same period last year. That was the biggest year-over-year gain since 2005, the

Realtors group said.

The best-performing metro area was Phoenix, where prices increased 34pc from a year earlier. Prices rose 31pc in the Detroit region, and 28pc in San Francisco.

The Kingston, New York, area had the biggest decline, with the median selling price falling 7.9pc in the quarter. It was followed by the Kankakee, Illinois, with a 7pc decrease, and Erie, Pennsylvania, with a 6.1pc drop.

– Bloomberg News



A huge influx of foreign clients has pushed rental prices at condominiums into record territory, real estate agents said last week. Pic: Aung Htay Hlaing

Condominiums in hot demand

By Htar Htar Khin

LAST year saw unprecedented rental demand for condominiums in Yangon and real estate agents say they are expecting an even better result in 2013.

U Sai Khung Nong, the managing director of Sai Khung Nong Real Estate and Law Firm in Tarmwe township, said the huge influx of foreigners during 2012 was the key factor driving condo demand.

"The condo rental in the past year has been hot, mostly as a result of demand from foreign clients, and prices have also been rising," he said.

"Prices in 2012 rose sharply over the previous year, and demand was at least 50 percent higher too," he said.

He added that rooms at popular condominiums, such as Pearl Condominium on Kabar Aye Pagoda Road in Bahan township, were renting for up to US\$3000 a month.

Apartments at Shwe Hintha Condominium, which has a swimming pool, are renting for upwards of \$3500 a month.

He said condominiums with shopping and dining options nearby are proving to be strong draws for clients.

"I've had many clients from China, Japan and Europe using my agency to rent apartments and condominiums in the past year. And these clients are typically interested in housing that has shopping nearby, although the structural condition of the building and security are also important," he said.

U Sai Khung Nong said he had learned that first impressions mattered for foreign clients.

"Many foreign firms are looking for accommodation for employees but there are many condominiums that are in poor shape, especially from the outside," he said.

U Sai Khung Nong added that the city has a shortage of high-end condominiums,

which has seen prices double in less than 12 months.

"But I hope demand will continue to grow as more foreign investors come. Everybody knows that there's a serious shortage of high quality apartments, serviced apartments and even hotel rooms," he said.

Ko Min Naing, the operations manager of Shining Star real estate agency in Ahlone township, said the bumper demand experienced during 2012 had highlighted the importance that foreigners place on layout and interior decoration.

"During the past year, our agency has been busy helping to find accommodation for a lot of foreigners, particularly in Dagon township where there are many blocks built by Naing Group and Shine Construction," he said.

"And Shwe Hintha Condo on Pyay Road has also been popular with foreigners. The common features of the popular developments are good facilities, security, good layout and attractive

interiors," he said.

"We completed 60 percent more leases in 2012 than the previous year," he said.

He added that Dagon township, especially the streets behind Park Royal Hotel, is the most sought-after destination for foreign clients.

"It's true that condos in the downtown area, or close by, are seeing better demand than those in Thingangyun, Tarmwe and Yankin townships, which I attribute to the amount of time they save the occupants on travel," Ko Min Naing said.

He added that a condominium law must be passed in the near future to protect the industry and raise standards.

"All of the developers and owners should prepare themselves for a condominium law, which will set minimum standards and stop the building of condominiums that do not have adequate parking or facilities.

"This will be an important issue this year," he said.

Proposed Manila development sparks protest

MANILA— Hundreds of Filipinos converged on the Philippine capital's main bayfront on February 12 for a "sunset watch" protest aimed at stopping what they say would be a disastrous reclamation project.

Armed with binoculars and cameras, the protesters called on the Manila city government to repeal an ordinance granting permission for a developer to reclaim 288 hectares (711 acres) of the bay.

"This reclamation will not only block the view of the famed sunset on Manila Bay but will also lead to worsening environmental degradation, like more floods," said Chiqui Mabanta, one of the organisers of the event.

The protest involved a broad coalition of Manila residents, artists, civic leaders and environmentalists called SOS Manila Bay, which last month filed a petition with city hall to stop the reclamation.

The protesters linked hands to form a human chain at sunset, while artists painted the famed views.

The group said the developer, Manila Goldcoast Development, had presented plans for an international cruise ship terminal to boost tourism to the area.

The complex would also house entertainment businesses and a high-rise residential development.

The protesters argue the

development would block vital drainage areas for the city, leading to heavier floods that already cause major damage every rainy season.

It would also eliminate prime sunset viewing on Manila Bay, which is a popular pastime for many residents who consider the area an oasis amid widespread urban blight in a heavily polluted city.

'This reclamation will block the sunset on Manila Bay and lead to worsening environmental degradation.'

Officials of the real estate company were not available for comment on February 12, although its chief executive was quoted in the local media last week as defending the environmental credentials of the project.

In 2005 Mabanta and other conservationists pressured the government into saving a 2.1-hectare (5.2-acre) forest park beside Manila city that was to have been felled for development.

"We hope to also win this battle to save Manila Bay," Mabanta said. — AFP



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Dated: 18 February 2013

A HOME CONTEST THAT'S ALL ABOUT STYLE

Advertorial

We interviewed with U Zaw Moe Shwe who is the Principal Architect of the Spine Architect Company. Here is the interview.

The Myanmar Times weekly journal's Property Editor, Htar Htar Khin went to interview with U Zaw Moe Shwe about the current development of architecture and home decoration industry in Myanmar, about the "Interior Design Contest", sponsored and hosted by the Myanmar Times and also about his view concerning the importance of architecture and home decoration industry.

Q. Are you satisfied with the current development in the Architecture and Interior Design Industry in Myanmar? What do you think about the current trend?

I think many people in Myanmar came to understand the importance of architecture. But I could not know the exact number of them.

There are some who understand the importance of architecture and there are still some who don't understand the importance of it and who still stereotyped the designs from the catalogue. Architecture is a subject that is essential.

When we build something or when we build a house. It can be said that this subject has come to be accepted by many in Myanmar. It is for the architecture issue.

For the interior, there are two things. One is interior decoration and the other is interior design. Many people were confused about the difference between the two. Some people asked me they wanted to do interior decorations for their house. They did not say like they wanted to do interior design. There are quite a few who knows that. Interior designs also involve functions while interior decorations only do decorations, choosing which colours to use and putting up a curtain.

But when we do interior design, it includes functions like where and how to put toilet and bathroom. For that, if we don't know how high we should put up a basin counter, that's the problem. If we don't know it, it can cause problems to the customers. And also we must know how wide a shower-room must be. That's interior design. *To be continue*

Creative Director of NatRay Design Studio

A home is where your soul is. Well, this is quite true since we sleep, relax, eat, shower and do most of our private stuff in a square box made up of concrete.

And most importantly, a home is where family gathers and spend quality time together. It is an environment that provide us shelter above our head rain or shine.

And a house is one of our most important asset one could ever had.

Everyone wants a beautiful house. Yes, each and everyone. At least we dreamt of one sometime in our life.

I always believed many home owner knows what type of design they want for their house. But many a times, it turns out to be an industrial disaster.

By turning your idea into reality is no easy task. It takes numerous

detailing work just to complete a small house. An idea is only an idea when it is not being realize after all.

Now, this is where an interior designer or rather an interior architect comes in. A professional interior expert have the ability to turn idea into reality.

When designing or decorating a home it's always important to pay attention to small details. Of course, the other elements like the color theme or

the big furniture are also important but it's often the little details that make the difference between a bright and fun home and a beautiful but boring one.

When I say small or little details I don't necessarily refer only to the actual size. Such detail can also consist in the texture or color of the floors for

example

or in the way the pattern from the wallpaper matches the furniture. When you usually find yourself in the spot when you've done everything you had to,

you've furnished and redecorated the house but there's still something missing, that means it's time to add some more details. The most important thing

when decorating a home is to be careful at the way the materials combine and the way the colors and textures work together. Make sure they don't clash and

always try to see beyond the obvious. Interior designers are trained and sensitive to colours and texture, they know best what works together.

Everyone can be a designer, but not everyone have the taste.

A HOME CONTEST THAT'S ALL ABOUT STYLE is jointly organized by The Myanmar Times, NatRay Co.,Ltd and the Association of Myanmar Interior Design (AMID).

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REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTESTANTS

- (1) Must be citizen of Myanmar.
- (2) Number of Pictures need to submit: 4 Photos
*** (Living room + master bedroom + Dining Room + structure of the whole house)
- (3) Picture size: 10" x 15"

DATE OF CONTEST

Last date for submission - 30 March, 2013
Date of announcement of winner - 29 April, 2013

* 20,000 Kyats Casabella Gift Voucher will be given to all those contestants who register for the contest.

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REQUIREMENTS FOR CONTESTANTS

- (1) Must be citizen of Myanmar.
- (2) Must be well-trained in Interior Design.
- (3) Member of Association of Myanmar Interior Designs
(One entitled to (1) and (2) can apply for membership)

DESIGN TO BE SUBMITTED

- (1) Interior Design already done anywhere in Myanmar.
- (2) Any type of design (10" x 15" one figure only)
For example: Completed Interior design of home, showroom, hotel and restaurants
- (3) Photo of completed design together with the design submitted to the owner (3D Rendering) or
(Orthographic Plan Elevation Section) 10" x 15" one figure only
- (4) Above two drawings (2) & (3) explanation and concept of Design not more than one page (A4)
Note* The following must not be included in colorful (10" x 15") figures. 1. Name of Design 2. Name of Design Company 3. Logo

DATE OF CONTEST

Last date for submission - 30 March, 2013
Date of announcement of winner - 29 April, 2013

Sponsors by - NatRay Co., Ltd & Casabella Home Furnishing Center

Organized by - The Myanmar Times

Supported by - Association of Myanmar Interior Design (AMID)
& NatRay Design Studio (NDS)

JUDGES FOR BEST INTERIOR DESIGN

1. Daw Khin Marla (NatRay Co., Ltd)
2. Mr. Ross Dunkley (Myanmar Consolidated Media)
3. Daw Hnin Si (Former Principal ZK School of Design)
4. U Win Myint (Architect)
5. U Wai Phyto (Senior Interior Designer)
6. Mr. Thomas (Interior Designer from NatRay Design Studio)

Note* 1. The Judges will inspect the Interior Design if needs be.
2. For membership of AMID, contact the following
Tel: 09 5500 575 | 09 5506 215 | 09 7314 5876 Email: interior.amid@gmail.com

JUDGES FOR BEAUTIFUL HOME CONTEST

1. U Sun Oo
(Association of Myanmar Interior Design)
2. Daw Khin Marla
(NatRay Co., Ltd)
3. Mr. Ross Dunkley
(Myanmar Consolidated Media)
4. Mr. Thomas
(Interior Designer from NatRay Design Studio)

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Competition terms and conditions

No NatRay or Myanmar Consolidated Media (MCM) employees, nor any member of their immediate families, may participate in the competition. Entrants must own the house, condominium or apartment entered into the competition; it cannot be a rented property. Entries must be made on an original entry form cut from a participating MCM product. Photocopies will not be accepted. All entries mailed to The Myanmar Times Head office, must clearly state in either English or Myanmar "The Myanmar Times/NatRay A home contest that's all about style" on the front. NatRay reserves the right to refuse poorly written or illegible entries. The competition will be drawn in Yangon on Friday, April 26, with the results to be published in The Myanmar Times (English) and (Myanmar) on Monday, April 29. By participating in the competition all entrants consent to allow MCM and NatRay to use the information submitted as deemed necessary. Additionally, the winner will allow MCM to publish a house profile that will expand on the original entry.



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US lags Europe on offshore wind power

WASHINGTON – Europe: 1662 turbines; United States: 0. After delays that left the American industry years behind other nations, the first wind farm off the US coast should finally produce electricity by 2015.

With Americans living atop mountains of coal and reserves of petroleum and natural gas, it is little wonder there is resistance to financing a renewable but expensive offshore energy resource that remains untapped in the United States.

Despite several proposals, and the blessing of environmentalists who describe them as sustainable alternatives to coal, not a single wind farm off the Atlantic coast has been built.

Several are in the works, but they have run up against political hurdles in states such as Maryland and Virginia, where lawmakers are hesitant to offer government subsidies.

As veteran energy expert Jim Lanard, president of the Offshore Wind Development Coalition, noted earlier this month, Europeans jumped ahead with heavy subsidisation of renewables like wind because they lacked the oil to meet their energy needs.

With far more indigenous energy supply, “there’s less pressure for the United States to do more in the renewable sector than in Europe, where there’s a greater pressure to achieve energy independence,” Lanard said.

“If you’re from a state with lots of coal, it doesn’t matter if you are a Democrat or a Republican, you’re going to

support an energy policy with coal,” Lanard said.

Coal provides 37 percent of US electricity, compared to natural gas at 30pc. Far behind is onshore wind at 3.4pc, but offshore resources would help boost that figure.

For some US lawmakers the jury is still out as to how human activity influences climate change. The American public has shown a stubborn indifference to the phenomenon compared to Europeans.

But wind received a shot in the arm in January, when Congress extended tax credits on all wind energy projects for this year. Such grants can amount to 30pc of investment costs.

Two offshore projects in particular will benefit, including Cape Wind, whose 130 huge turbines are being developed in Massachusetts for the waters near Martha’s Vineyard, the tony island playground where President Barack Obama and other VIPs spend their vacations.

One of the state’s richest men, the billionaire conservative coal and gas investor Bill Koch, has spent years campaigning in vain against the project.

A smaller wind farm of five turbines in water five kilometres (three miles) off Block Island, in the state of Rhode Island, is aimed at replacing diesel generators which have powered the community for years.

Electricity generated by offshore wind costs two to three times more than onshore wind, said Steve Clemmer, who heads energy research for the Union of Concerned Scientists.



A wind farm near Tehachapi in Kern County, California. Despite having no offshore wind farms, the US added more than 13 gigawatts of wind power from onshore farms in 2012, said the Global Wind Energy Council, a trade body. Wind farms added a record 44.7 gigawatts in electricity production last year, increasing capacity by 19 percent to 282.5 gigawatts, the council said on February 11. It said the EU accounted for 37.5pc of the total, followed by China with 26.8pc and the US with 21.2pc. Pic: EPA

“It’s really more economical to develop projects on land,” Clemmer told *AFP*.

That is especially true in the United States, where on-land wind resources are more abundant than in Europe.

Cape Wind will sell energy for 18.7 cents a kilowatt hour for the first year. By comparison, a coal-fired plant can produce electricity at about 10 cents a kWh. Electricity from onshore wind farms can be even cheaper.

Offshore wind can be a money pit: extensive

research is needed to identify the best location and assess risks to marine life; installation, maintenance and replacement in deep water can incur crushing costs, and the use of boats to transport equipment and workers runs up the bill.

Some states such as New Jersey, despite experts proclaiming viability for offshore wind, have let projects wither. Operators have thrown in the towel for lack of funding.

But technology favours

projects in the open water, where winds are strongest. The government estimates combined offshore potential for 10 projects at 3800 megawatts, the equivalent of three nuclear power plants and enough to power millions of homes in the crowded northeast.

A new technology being developed, for deepwater “floating” turbines, also solves a central criticism of wind power: visual and noise pollution. A first contract has been approved in the state of

Maine.

Job creation is the ultimate carrot for cautious states, and expert Michael Conathan at the Center for American Progress think tank said there is value in being an early entrant.

“If you are first, you are going to be effectively in the driver seat for who gets the shoreside industrial development, who’s going to get the jobs (and) where they’ll build the first turbine construction facility,” he said. – *AFP*

WEB DEVELOPER

The web developer will assist with the development of the English and Myanmar news sites for the Myanmar Times, as well as other sites for Myanmar Consolidated Media (MCM), including classifieds, archives and more. He or she will report directly to the Online Editor.

The web developer must:

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- ▶ Know the following languages for development: PHP and MySQL
- ▶ Know the following languages for design: CSS, JavaScript, jQuery, HTML, XML
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- ▶ Know how to use the following software: Adobe Photoshop and Dreamweaver
- ▶ Have a good understanding of graphic design and front-end web design
- ▶ Provide his or her portfolio

Applicants should send a one page abridged curriculum vitae together with a covering letter summarizing the reasons why they believe they are the most suitable person for the position.

Applications will be accepted until end of February 2013 and can be sent to



The Human Resources Manager
Myanmar Consolidated Media Company Limited

379-383 Bo Aung Kyaw St, Yangon Or by email to mcmhrd@myanmartimes.com.mm

Watson goes to work on a cure for cancer

WASHINGTON – IBM is putting its Watson supercomputer to work fighting cancer, in what is described as the first commercial program of its kind to use “big data” to help patients with the disease.

The US computing giant unveiled its initiative earlier this month with health insurer WellPoint and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

The supercomputer, which gained fame by defeating two human champions in the “Jeopardy!” quiz show, has been sifting through some 600,000 pieces of medical evidence, two million pages of text from 42 medical journals and clinical trials in oncology research.

This can speed up the way data is analysed to make the best diagnosis and find the optimal treatment, says Craig Thompson, Sloan-Kettering’s president.

“It can take years for the latest developments in oncology to reach all practice settings,” Thompson said.

IBM first announced plans to work with WellPoint in 2011 and last year

began receiving data from the New York research hospital, which specialises in cancer.

The first application will work with 1500 lung cancer cases, where clinicians and analysts are training Watson to extract and interpret physician notes, lab results and clinical research.

The Maine Center for Cancer Medicine and Westmed Medical Group will be two centres testing the service and providing feedback to WellPoint, IBM and Memorial Sloan-Kettering.

“IBM’s work with WellPoint and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center represents a landmark collaboration in how technology and evidence based medicine can transform the way in which health care is practiced,” said Manoj Saxena at IBM.

The program is being commercialised under the name Interactive Care Insights for Oncology, powered by Watson.

Watson, named after IBM founder Thomas Watson, can ingest tens of million pages of data in seconds.

– *AFP*

Better out than in, discovers air travel flatulence study

WELLINGTON – A group of medical specialists has provided an answer to a dilemma that has faced flyers since the Wright brothers took to the air in 1903 – is it okay to fart mid-flight?

The experts' recommendation is an emphatic yes to airline passengers – but a warning to cockpit crews that breaking wind could distract the pilot and pose a safety risk.

The study concluded that anecdotal evidence that flying increases flatulence is not hot air, finding that

changes in air pressure at altitude result in the gut producing more gas.

When Danish gastroenterologist Jacob Rosenberg encountered the malodorous problem first-hand on a flight from Copenhagen to Tokyo, he enlisted some of the finest minds in his field to address the issue.

The result was an in-depth review of scientific literature on flatulence, looking at issues such as whether women's farts smell worse than men's (yes), what causes the odour

(sulphur) and how often the average person passes wind every day (10).

The bottom line, said the 3000-word study published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* on February 15, is that airline passengers should ignore the social embarrassment of breaking wind and "just let it go".

"(Holding back) holds significant drawbacks for the individual, such as discomfort and even pain, bloating, dyspepsia (indigestion), pyrosis (heartburn) just to name but a few resulting

abdominal symptoms," the study found.

"Moreover, problems resulting from the required concentration to maintain such control may even result in subsequent stress symptoms."

The authors – five gastroenterologists from Denmark and Britain – said that while passengers may experience poor service from the cabin crew as a result of their decision, the health benefits outweighed any negative effects.

However, they said the

cockpit crew faced a lose-lose situation. "On the one hand, if the pilot restrains a fart, all the drawbacks previously mentioned, including impaired concentration, may affect his abilities to control the plane," the researchers said.

"On the other hand, if he lets go of the fart, his co-pilot may be affected by its odour, which again reduces safety onboard the flight."

The authors canvassed a number of solutions to the issue of flight-induced flatulence, including using

methane breath tests to screen wind-prone passengers from flights, but rejected them as impractical.

They noted that the textile covers used on seats in economy class absorbed up to 50 percent of odours because they are gas permeable, unlike the leather seats in first class.

They suggested airlines could improve the odour-eating properties of the seats and issue special blankets and trousers to passengers to minimise mid-air flatulence.

– AFP

North Korean N-test poses dilemma for Beijing, say analysts

BEIJING – North Korea's third nuclear test last week presents China under its new leader Xi Jinping with an unwelcome choice – confront its defiant ally or accept having an uncontrollable atomic state on its border.

Beijing is the North's most important backer, providing its neighbour with trade and aid that have enabled the regime to survive since the 1950-53 Korean War, which historians estimate killed as many as 400,000 Chinese troops.

In China's strategic thinking, North Korea is a "buffer zone" that prevents the 28,500 US troops stationed in South Korea encroaching on its own border.

But with Kim Jong-Un's government again the subject of international fury, the relationship risks increasingly becoming an irritant for Beijing, analysts say.

"More and more people realise that North Korea is more like a security liability than a security asset to China," said Jia Qingguo, an expert on China's foreign relations at Peking University.

"China treasures stability in the Korean peninsula. But the problem is, North

Korea's action is very destabilising."

He added that Beijing's thinking on the North would not "change overnight" and that Xi's ascent – he now heads the Communist Party and is due to become state president next month – was unlikely to drive a new approach in itself.

Many social media users in China want a tougher line against North Korea. One

'China treasures stability in the Korean peninsula.'

last week likened Pyongyang to a "crazy dog" that had humiliated Beijing.

But while expressing "firm opposition" to the February 12 blast, China's foreign ministry reiterated calls for calm and restraint and did not mention potential reprisals, echoing its statements after the North's tests in 2006 and 2009.

As then, it stated its support for denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula and backed a six-party dialogue that groups China, the United States, both Koreas, Japan and Russia. However, the forum has been moribund since 2009.

Meanwhile the state-run *Xinhua* news agency said in

a commentary that the latest blast was an attempt by a "desperate DPRK" (North Korea) to keep a perceived external threat at bay, stressing its "strong sense of insecurity".

"I think China probably needs to act somehow, at least do something to show that this time China is serious," said Jing-Dong Yuan, an Asia security expert at the University of Sydney.

"There also needs to be serious discussion within Chinese leadership" about the strategic value of their wayward neighbour, he added.

China fears that a crisis in North Korea would bring refugees flooding across the border, a US-backed escalation in the region, or even ultimately a unified Korea with a US military presence on its doorstep.

Jia said support in China for a tougher line on North Korea was growing, and he expected Beijing to show more backing for international measures against Pyongyang, but it would still look to balance that with stability.

"The international community should not expect too much from China," he said. – AFP

• **Commentary, P. 38.**

'Blade Runner' denies murder charge

PRETORIA – Olympic star Oscar Pistorius broke down in tears in the dock on February 15 as he was charged with the Valentine's Day murder of his model girlfriend, a charge he denied "in the strongest terms".

The South African Paralympian gold medallist sobbed as Pretoria magistrate Desmond Nair announced a single charge of killing his lover, blonde covergirl Reeva Steenkamp.

Pistorius, 26, sat hunched and sobbing as the court heard that prosecutors

will argue the murder was premeditated, meaning he could face a life sentence.

He was remanded in custody after a bail hearing was delayed until February 19 to allow the defence more time to prepare.

In a statement issued by Pistorius's family and management company after the court appearance, the fallen star said "the alleged murder is disputed in the strongest terms."

Steenkamp, 29, was shot four times at Pistorius's upmarket Pretoria home in the early hours of February 14.

Steenkamp was killed with a 9mm pistol registered to Pistorius, suffering wounds to the head and hand and dying at the scene.

The *Beeld* newspaper said on February 15 the shots that killed Steenkamp were fired through a bathroom door but there was no police confirmation.

Better-known as "Blade Runner" because of his carbon fibre prostheses, Pistorius became the first double-amputee to compete alongside able-bodied athletes at the Olympics. – AFP

• **Related report, P. 62**



Damage caused by the shockwave from the meteor to the wall of a zinc factory in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk on February 15. Pic: AFP

Shockwave from falling meteor leaves hundreds hurt in Russia

MOSCOW – A plunging meteor which exploded with a blinding flash above central Russia, set off a shockwave that shattered windows and hurt almost 1000 people in an event unprecedented in modern times.

Experts insisted the meteor's fiery entry into the atmosphere on February 15 was not linked to the asteroid 2012 DA 14, which later passed about 27,700 kilometres (17,200 miles) above the Earth without incident in an unusually close approach.

The fall of such a large meteor estimated as weighing dozens of tonnes was extremely rare, while the number of casualties as a consequence of its burning up around a heavily-inhabited area was unprecedented.

Chelyabinsk regional governor Mikhail Yurevich, quoted by the *RIA Novosti* news agency, said 950 people were injured, with two-

thirds of the injuries light wounds from glass shards and other materials blown out by the shockwave.

Windows were shattered by the shockwave across the city's region with the ministry saying almost 300 buildings were damaged including schools, hospitals, a zinc factory and an ice hockey stadium.

"At 9:20 am (0320 GMT), an object was observed above Chelyabinsk which flew by at great speed and left a trail behind. Within two minutes there were two bangs," regional emergencies official Yuri Burenko said in a statement.

However it has yet to be finally confirmed if meteorite fragments made contact with the Earth and there were no reports that any locals had been hurt directly by a falling piece of meteorite.

Schools were closed for the day and theatre shows cancelled across the region after the shock wave

blew out windows amid temperatures as low as minus 18 degrees Celsius (zero degrees Fahrenheit).

"Thank God that nothing fell onto inhabited areas," President Vladimir Putin said in a meeting with Emergencies Minister Vladimir Puchkov, ordering him to look into how to warn citizens about such events.

The meteor explosion appears to be one of the most stunning cosmic events above Russia since the 1908 Tunguska Event, when a massive blast most scientists blame on an asteroid or a comet impact ripped through Siberia.

"I am scratching my head to think of anything in recorded history when that number of people have been indirectly injured by an object like this... it's very, very rare to have human casualties," said Robert Massey, deputy executive secretary of Britain's Royal Astronomical Society.

– AFP

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Reform agenda dominates State of the Union speech

WASHINGTON – President Barack Obama last week staked his second term on an ambitious bid to mend America, pledging to narrow inequality, reignite the economy, fight gun crime and fix immigration.

Anchoring his annual State of the Union address on February 12 on domestic priorities, Obama dealt only in passing with foreign policy crises, including North Korea's nuclear test and Iran's controversial atomic program.

Closing in on his goal of ending an era of draining US wars abroad, Obama announced plans to halve US troop numbers in Afghanistan within a year, while vowing that the global pursuit of terror would go on.

He also struck a note of optimism in counselling middle class Americans still gripped by economic angst.

"Together, we have cleared away the rubble of crisis and can say with renewed confidence that the state of our union is stronger," Obama said, in a speech punctuated by 23 standing ovations in the House of Representatives.

The address, before a huge national audience, was Obama's best chance to sell his second-term plans to a divided nation and to stave off the domestic lame duck status all second-term presidents dread.

"A growing economy that creates good, middle-class jobs – that must be the North Star that guides our efforts,"



US President Barack Obama gestures while delivering the annual State of the Union address to a joint session of the US Congress in Washington on February 12. Pic: AFP

Obama said, seeking to turn election vows that everyone should get a "fair shot" into reality.

Obama's message was unapologetically tailored to a domestic American audience, as he insisted that government investment must bankroll jobs growth.

But Republicans wasted no time in criticising Obama's plans.

"President Obama? He believes ... that the economic downturn happened because our government didn't tax enough, spend enough and control enough," said

rising star Senator Marco Rubio, giving the Republican rebuttal speech.

"As you heard tonight, his solution to virtually every problem we face is for Washington to tax more,

borrow more and spend more."

Obama was at his most passionate when making the case for measures to stem gun violence, following the massacre of 20 children at a Connecticut primary school in December.

"If you want to vote no, that's your choice," he cried, drawing lawmakers to their feet in an emotional tribute

to victims of gun crime.

"These proposals deserve a vote."

On another top domestic issue, Obama said he wanted a bill to reform the immigration system to give illegal immigrants a path to citizenship within months – the one area where bipartisan compromise seems likely.

In a keenly awaited move, he announced the return of 34,000 of the 66,000 US troops in Afghanistan by next February, ahead of a full withdrawal in 2014.

Obama said North Korea's nuclear test on February 12 would only further its isolation, and promised to stand by Asian allies.

Obama said "Iran must recognise that now is the time for a diplomatic solution," ahead of new talks with world powers this month on Tehran's nuclear program.

Arguing al-Qaeda was a "shadow" of its former self, Obama pledged to help nations such as Yemen, Libya, and Somalia provide for their own security.

Breaking new ground, Obama announced the start of formal talks between the United States and the European Union on a trans-Atlantic trade pact and previewed a new plan to thwart cyber attacks on US infrastructure.

Obama pledged to keep up pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime and said he would stand firm in defence of Israel, which he will visit next month. – AFP



Pope Benedict XVI at St Peter's Basilica on February 13 after celebrating his final mass. Benedict is the second pope to resign for health reasons in 2000 years and the first to stand down in more than 700 years. Pic: AFP

Applause and tears at pope's last mass

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI urged an end to "religious hypocrisy" and "rivalry" in the Roman Catholic Church as he donned his papal mitre for the last time for an emotional mass in St Peter's Basilica on February 13.

The 85-year-old pope was hailed with a standing ovation and waves of applause from a congregation of thousands where many broke down in tears, as cardinals doffed their mitres in a final gesture of respect.

Wearing the purple robes of Lent – a period of penitence for Christians – the pope was conveyed through the basilica's vast nave on a mobile platform that underlined his growing infirmity.

Benedict called for greater sincerity in his final mass as leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics before he becomes only the second pontiff to resign voluntarily in the Church's 2000-year history when he stands down on February 28.

He condemned "religious hypocrisy" and urged an end to "individualism and rivalry".

"The face of the Church... is at times disfigured. I am thinking in particular of the sins against the unity of the Church," he said, a possible reference to the many scandals plaguing the institution.

Christ "denounces religious hypocrisy, a behaviour that seeks applause and approval. The true disciple does not serve himself or the 'public', but his Lord, in simplicity and generosity," Benedict said.

The pope cut short the applause at the end of mass, saying "Let's return to prayer", before leaving the basilica, waving and smiling at the congregation.

Earlier on February 13, the frail pontiff was greeted by chants of "Benedetto" and a banner reading "Thank You, Holiness" at his weekly audience with thousands of believers in a Vatican auditorium.

Benedict told the crowd he had taken his momentous decision "for the good of the Church".

"Keep praying for me, for the Church and for the future pope," he said, his voice full of emotion.

The Vatican announced that cardinal electors – the princes of the Church – will meet on March 15 or soon after to choose Benedict's successor.

The secret conclave held in the Sistine Chapel should produce a new pope in time for Easter.

Rumours have begun flying over front-runners to succeed Benedict, but no clear favourite has emerged yet and the decision will be up to the 117 elector cardinals.

While some hope that Africa or Asia could yield the next pontiff, others have tipped prominent European or North American cardinals.

Benedict announced on February 11 that he would resign because he no longer had the strength to carry out his duties.

Although the Vatican has denied that specific health problems influenced his decision, it said on February 12 he had a secret operation to replace the batteries in his pacemaker three months ago.

The pope will hold his final general audience on February 27, a farewell event for all in St Peter's Square, before retiring to a little-known monastery within Vatican walls, just a stone's throw away from his successor.

Asked about this unprecedented "cohabitation", Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi replied: "I think the successor and the cardinals will be very happy to have very close by the person who best of all can understand the spiritual needs of the Church."

Only one other pope has resigned voluntarily – Celestine V in 1294 – a humble hermit who stepped down after just a few months saying he could no longer bear the intrigues of Rome.

– AFP

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Briefs

Zimbabwe sets referendum date

HARARE – Zimbabwe's prime minister said on February 13 that the country will hold a constitutional referendum in March followed by elections in July, a timetable that will decide the fate of veteran President Robert Mugabe.

The referendum was announced by Morgan Tsvangirai, Mugabe's rival in the power sharing government.

Zimbabweans will be asked in the March 16 referendum to vote on a basic law that would, for the first time, set presidential term limits and abolish the head of state's immunity.

Hagel's nomination faces 10-day delay

WASHINGTON – US Senate Republicans successfully blocked Chuck Hagel's nomination to be President Barack Obama's next Pentagon chief on February 14, forcing a 10-day delay in his confirmation vote.

By a vote of 58-40 with one member voting present, Democrats failed to overcome a procedural roadblock put up by Republicans who had demanded more time to receive answers to their questions. It leaves Hagel's nomination in limbo while the Senate takes a week-long recess.

French auction house cancels seal deal

PARIS – A French auction house has cancelled the sale of a historic Chinese seal for 1.1 million euros (US\$1.4 million) after threats of legal action alleging it may have been stolen from Beijing's Summer Palace in 1860.

Artcurial cancelled the December sale due "to the emotions provoked in China", a spokesman said on February 15, adding: "We have conveyed our decision to the buyer and the seller."

The green jade seal, which dates from the Qianlong period (1736-95) and had been expected to fetch up to 200,000 euros.

French firm blamed for horsemeat scandal

PARIS – France has pinned much of the blame for Europe's horse scandal on a French firm that allegedly sold 750 tonnes of horsemeat as beef that ended up in millions of ready-to-eat meals sold throughout the continent.

The move came on February 14 as police in Britain arrested three men suspected of passing horse off as beef and as Germany joined the ranks of countries where frozen "beef" lasagne was found to contain horsemeat.

– AFP

ICC now a 'fully functioning' institution: judge

NEW YORK – The International Criminal Court may sometimes seem powerless and far from its grandiose goal of ending atrocities, but it has survived its initial growing pains, its president said on February 12.

South Korean judge Sang-Hyun Song said in the early years after the court's creation in 2002 it was "not at all sure that this big new creature called the ICC would be able to survive the hostility from the big powers."

"Ten years later, however, I'm happy to tell you we've grown to be a fully functioning international institution," Song said

in a speech at Columbia University in New York.

Song said relations with the United States, which has not joined the treaty creating the court in The Hague, have been difficult, particularly under the administration of George W. Bush.

The chances of Washington agreeing to join the court any time soon are slim, he said, given that many US politicians fear the ICC would be used to prosecute alleged American rights abuses abroad.

"We have to face domestic political reality in this country," Song admitted, but added that, nevertheless "the ICC and the Obama

administration in particular have been enjoying rather close cooperation."

"It ranges from simple intelligence sharing down to the US government's dispatch of 100 military advisors to Uganda, with the hope of helping Uganda arresting Joseph Kony," he said, referring to a notorious warlord.

Other prominent powers that have been accused of crimes against humanity and remain outside of the court include China, Israel and Russia.

Even in Africa, where nearly all the court's activities are concentrated, results come slowly.

Song acknowledged the difficulty the court is having prosecuting cases in Kenya against four suspects accused of fuelling bloodshed after an election in 2007.

Two of them are politicians running together on the presidential ticket in next month's election.

Song said the trials are due to start in April, but "since there are so many variables here, we don't know what's going to happen."

An attempt to prosecute Moamer Kadhafi's former spy chief Abdullah Senussi and the former Libyan leader's son on charges of crimes against humanity has also run into trouble, with Tripoli

so far refusing to hand them over.

Song said he remains optimistic about the court's future.

"By design, the ICC is obligated to walk a very fine line," he said, and "we are far from eradicating depravity and mass violence."

But "with every year that goes by the normative consensus grows stronger that justice must be done in the case of mass atrocities."

In any case, Song said, drawing a laugh from the prestigious university audience: "Fortunately, I have been blessed with unlimited Asian patience."

– AFP



A reveller of the Sao Clemente samba school performs during the second night of the Carnival parade at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on February 11. The Vila Isabel samba school was on February 13 crowned champion of this year's Carnival, which attracted about six million people, including 900,000 tourists, over five days. Pic: AFP

British police arrest six in new hacking probe

LONDON – British police arrested six former *News of the World* journalists on February 13 in a new probe into alleged phone hacking at Rupert Murdoch's now-closed tabloid, Scotland Yard said.

Investigators had identified a "further suspected conspiracy" at the paper in 2005 and 2006 which was separate to the alleged hacking under which a number of people have already been charged, the police force said in a statement.

The *News of the World* closed in disgrace in 2011 amid allegations that it had hacked the mobile phone voicemails of hundreds of celebrities, politicians and victims of crime and

terrorism.

"Detectives on Operation Weeting have identified a further suspected conspiracy to intercept telephone voicemails by a number of employees who worked for the now defunct *News of the World* newspaper," Scotland Yard said.

"As part of the new lines of inquiry six people were arrested this morning on suspicion of conspiracy to intercept telephone communications... All of them are journalists or former journalists."

Operation Weeting was launched in January 2011 to investigate a string of allegations over hacking at the weekly *News of the World*. – AFP

Rebels make gains as US tells Assad to go

DAMASCUS – Rebels in northern Syria have seized most of a military base, their third major battlefield success in as many days last week, as US Secretary of State John Kerry called on President Bashar al-Assad to step down.

Kerry said Assad needed to abandon hopes of riding out the war and instead accept the "inevitability" of his departure, hours after a monitoring group reported rebels were almost in complete control of the base in Aleppo province.

"We need to address the question of President Assad's calculation currently," he told reporters on February 13. "I believe there are additional things that can be done to change his current perception."

Kerry added, after talks with Jordan Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, that he was convinced – given the current situation on the ground – "that there is an inevitability here" although it "hasn't sunk into him yet".

Russia earlier insisted it was ready to host talks with both sides in the conflict which has a death toll approaching 70,000.

In Moscow, a top Russian

diplomat said Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem and Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib, the head of the opposition umbrella National Coalition, would make separate visits for talks in the coming weeks.

Syrian state television reported that the foreign ministry welcomed the invitation, while stressing that the minister would not meet opposition leader Khatib personally.

In Syria, at least another 145 people were killed throughout the country on

'...there is an inevitability here.'

February 13, including 66 civilians, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

It also reported the rebels' seizure of most of the military base in Aleppo province, in the north.

Most of Base 80 "has come under insurgent control" a day after rebel fighters launched a coordinated assault on two airports that the strategic facility's troops are tasked with securing," it said.

Dozens on both sides were killed, said the Britain-based group.

The insurgents on February 12 overran a military air base at Al-Jarrah, also in Aleppo province, after seizing Syria's largest dam in the neighbouring province of Raqa, to the east, the previous day.

Activists say Aleppo's insurgents have shifted their focus from targets in the provincial capital to military bases because of the ammunition and weaponry there, but also to put out of action warplanes used to bomb rebel bastions.

Commenting on the rebels' advance in Aleppo province, Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP the army might have decided to give up on parts of northern Syria in order to secure the centre.

"The regime understands it cannot survive a transition without securing some land to bargain with," he added.

Regime warplanes nevertheless carried out several air raids on rebel areas in Aleppo province while army tanks shelled the east Damascus district of Jobar, the Observatory said. – AFP

Iran talks fail again, says UN watchdog

VIENNA – The chief UN atomic inspector said on February 14 that talks with Iran had failed again to reach a deal on enhanced inspections of Tehran's nuclear program, two weeks before a major meeting with world powers.

"We had discussions on the structured approach document but could not finalise the document," Herman Nackaerts of the International Atomic Energy Agency told reporters at Vienna airport after returning from Tehran.

"Our commitment to continued dialogue is unwavering. We will work hard now to resolve the remaining differences but time is needed to reflect on the way forward," he said.

"We haven't agreed yet on a date for the next meeting."

He declined to comment on whether the two sides had made any progress towards a deal, but Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, was characteristically more upbeat.

"Some differences were resolved and agreement on some issues in the modality was reached," Soltanieh was quoted as saying by the Iranian news agency ISNA on February 14.

The meeting was the latest in a string of attempts by the IAEA to press Iran to grant

access to sites, scientists and documents that the agency believes may have been part of a covert nuclear weapons drive.

Iran says that the IAEA's allegations are based on flawed Western and Israeli intelligence – which it has not been allowed to see – and says it has never sought to develop the bomb.

This latest failure comes less than two weeks before talks between Iran and six world powers – the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany – in Kazakhstan on February 26.

These talks follow three rounds in 2012, the last in Moscow in June, at which the six, known as the P5+1, pressed Iran to scale back key areas of its nuclear program.

Iran however walked away because the P5+1 stopped short of offering Tehran relief from UN Security Council and unilateral Western sanctions that last year began to cause major economic problems for the Persian Gulf country.

In particular the six want Iran to suspend the enrichment of uranium to purities of 20 percent, which for the international community is the most worrisome part of Iran's activities.

– AFP



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Time for harder line on North Korea

COMMENT
by Dan Blumenthal

WASHINGTON – North Korea is yanking the world's chain yet again, sending all relevant parties hither and yon in the wake of its nuclear test on February 12.

As the United States contemplates what to do and the Kim clan perfects its ability to deliver its growing nuclear arsenal to targets in South Korea, Japan and the United States, *Foreign Policy* sought the views of a rising star of Korea analysis: Sung-Yoon Lee of Tufts University.

Professor Lee provides a much-needed dose of reality about what exactly the United States is dealing with. The basics are not a bad place to start in thinking or rethinking how to deal with North Korea. The following is an edited version of what Lee said at a conference in Seoul earlier this month (with the commentary in italics and the concluding thoughts being those of Dan Blumenthal).

1. North Korea is "uniquely unique." It is the world's sole communist hereditary dynasty, the world's only literate-industrialised-urbanised peacetime economy to have suffered a famine, the world's most cultish totalitarian system, and the world's most secretive, isolated country – albeit one with the world's largest military in terms of manpower and defence spending proportional to its population and national income. The result is an exceptional state, perhaps the world's most influential regional power commensurate with its territorial and population size and economic and political power.

That is, North Korea has managed some seemingly impossible feats. It has remained a cultish communist dictatorship even though all its like-minded brethren have been relegated

to the ash heap of history. It has managed to produce a spate of famines despite the fact that its population is urbanised and literate. And through its combination of supremely disproportionate spending on military forces, its nuclear program, and its unique ability to outfox, out-negotiate and outplay the world's industrialised powers, it has become a regional nuclear power with disproportionate influence in Northeast Asia despite its poverty and privation.

2. The other Korea, the one south of the 38th parallel, is a global leader in trade, shipping, automobiles and electronics. It is also a free democratic polity. On December 19, South Korea elected Park Geun-hye as president. Park is the first elected female leader in South Korea. The contrast between the two Koreas could not be starker – beyond the obvious, you have a cultish male hereditary dictatorship in the North, and a freely elected female leader in the South.

Development experts and theorists of democratisation take note. South Korea has the same culture, historical legacies and so on as its neighbour to the North. And yet it is an advanced industrial economy and a thriving democracy that has just, despite its Confucian culture, elected a woman as president. Given the stark contrast between the two countries one can safely draw at least one conclusion: There is nothing inherent in culture or history that ipso facto should keep a country poor and enslaved.

3. The Park Geun-hye administration and the Obama administration should...not deprive themselves of the credible, non-military deterrent that would weaken or debilitate the Kim regime. They should attack the North Korean regime's two most glaring systemic contradictions: 1. Over-reliance on its shadowy palace economy instead of making licit goods that are competitive on the



A poster of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un burns during a protest held in Seoul on February 12 after Pyongyang staged in most powerful nuclear test yet, in defiance of global powers, including its sole patron, China. Pic: AFP

world market or opening up to foreign investment and trade worthy of the name. Pyongyang's palace economy is particularly vulnerable to tools designed to counter international money laundering. 2. [T]he unfeasibility of controlling the population over the long-term through its vast network of prison camps,

fear and thought police; that is, its egregious human rights violations.

The North Korean state is essentially two things: 1) a large money-laundering concern; 2) the world's largest prison and slave labour camp. Now, however, it is a large money-laundering concern and prison camp that has additionally extorted its way to nuclear weapons. Any US policy should begin and end with the knowledge of what North Korea really is. It is not a state engaged in the normal give-and-take of diplomacy, seeking "security assurances" in return for "denuclearisation" or some other such deal conjured up by diplomats whose experience is in dealing with real countries who negotiate in good faith. Rather, North Korea has had a pretty good run with its current approach of extortion, criminality and the deprivation of its own people.

4. The Obama administration is in a position to take the lead on squeezing Pyongyang's palace economy. It should designate the entire North Korean government a Primary Money Laundering Concern, which is a legal term for entities that fail to implement adequate safeguards against money laundering. It should also enforce Executive Orders

13382 (signed June 2005) and 13551 (signed August 2010), which call for the freezing of suspect North Korean entities' assets and those of third-country entities suspected of helping North Korea's WMD proliferation (and criminal) activities. Furthermore, the incoming Park Geun-hye administration is in a position to take the lead in implementing a sustained human rights campaign against Pyongyang. It should vastly increase funding for information transmission efforts into North Korea, encourage North Korean defection and reinforce resettlement programs, and raise global awareness on the Kim regime's egregious human rights violations so that people living in democratic societies around the globe come to think less of the Kim regime as an oddity or an abstraction and more as a threat to humanity.

North Korea's nature underscores its vulnerabilities. It cannot survive without laundering money for its dangerous and illicit activities. It should not be treated as a normal country when most of its people are enslaved. The countries threatened by Pyongyang have in their toolkit the ability to treat the entire state apparatus as a criminal enterprise and can block it and anyone (including

many Chinese banks and enterprises) doing business with it from engaging in transactions within the international financial and commercial system. Rather than pretending that they are negotiating with just another regime, the United States and South Korea should instead unleash a campaign to highlight just how abnormal and illegitimate the Kim family is. There may be little to nothing the world can do about the fact that it has allowed the North to become a nuclear weapons state. But it can and should treat it like one big criminal/slave state.

Some concluding thoughts: South Korea and Japan, for reasons that should be obvious (North Korea, China, an unsteady and retrenching American presence), have elected right-of-centre hawkish governments. They are uniquely open to dealing with reality, not a common occurrence in international politics. Reality in this case means taking all necessary deterrent measures against a nuclear state. Rather than engage in diplomatic conferences that result in more North Korean extortion, more North Korean nuclear weapons, and more illusions that through combined US and Chinese exertions North Korea can actually be convinced (against all evidence) that the illegal possession of nuclear weapons actually has a price, it would be wise to consider Lee's basic idea. Let's deal with North Korea as Lee describes it – a criminal enterprise whose crimes can and must be stopped.

There is another looming problem. A second term in a presidency seems to provide a unique temptation to American secretaries of state across administrations to go for the a Nobel Peace Prize for "solving" the North Korean problem. In this case, at least from Pyongyang's perspective, there is nothing to be solved. North Korea has pretty much what it wants. But now that Seoul and Tokyo (hopefully Washington too?) are ready to call North Korea a nuclear power, there may be one thing to discuss with Kim: What would happen if he dared use those weapons?

Perhaps to guard against the "North Korea Nobel Peace Prize" temptation, a parallel prize can be created, awarded to those diplomats who avoid attempts to bargain away that which the North has never put on the table, and instead achieve the more modest task of bettering the lot of the North Korean people and putting an end to the many crimes of Kim Jong Un and his cronies. – *Foreign Policy*

(Dan Blumenthal is a current commissioner and former vice chairman of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, where he directs efforts to monitor, investigate and provide recommendations to the Congress on the national security implications of the economic relationship between the two countries).

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Tibetan dies in China as self-immolations reach grim milestone

BEIJING – A Tibetan man burnt himself to death in protest against Chinese rule, reports and Western rights groups said on February 14, bringing the total to have set themselves on fire to at least 101 since 2009.

US-based *Radio Free Asia* said the man, Lobsang Namgyal, who it described as a former monk from the Kirti monastery, self-immolated the previous week near a police station in Aba prefecture, a Tibetan area of Sichuan province in southern China.

The 37-year-old was one of a family of four brothers and four sisters and was detained and harassed last year by police, *RFA* said, citing exiles monks.

Many Tibetans in China accuse the government of religious repression and eroding their culture, as the country's majority Han ethnic group increasingly moves into historically Tibetan areas.

The report takes the number of ethnic Tibetans to have set themselves on fire since 2009 to 101, after an exile turned himself into a ball of fire on February 13 in front of the Boudhanath Stupa, a Buddhist monument in Kathmandu. At least 85 have died, tallies show.

The exile in Nepal, in his early 20s, died of his injuries late on February 13 with burns covering 96 percent of his body, a hospital official said.

Stephanie Brigden, director of the London-based campaign group Free Tibet, said: "This grim milestone should be a source of shame to the Chinese authorities who are responsible and to the world leaders who have yet to show any leadership in response to the ongoing crisis in Tibet."



An exiled Tibetan monk is engulfed in flames near the Boudhanath Stupa in the Nepalese capital, Kathmandu, on February 13. He died later that day of injuries. Pic: AFP

Beijing rejects criticism of its rule, saying Tibetans enjoy religious freedom and pointing to huge investment it says has brought modernisation and a better standard of living to Tibet.

Authorities have sought to suppress the gruesome protests by arresting those it accuses of inciting them and prosecuting them for murder, and have embarked on a major publicity drive on the issue in recent weeks.

Beijing routinely accuses the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and his "clique" of inciting such acts to push a separatist agenda.

The Dalai Lama, who says he is not seeking Tibetan independence but greater autonomy, fled his homeland in 1959 after a failed uprising. He has since based himself in the Indian hill town of Dharamshala. – AFP

Australian TV expose caused uproar at Mossad: reporter

SYDNEY – The journalist who revealed the identity of a prisoner kept incommunicado in Israel described on February 15 the frantic reaction of Israeli spy chiefs desperate to keep a lid on the mysterious story.

"Prisoner X", identified by media as Australian-Israeli Mossad agent Ben Zygier, died in December 2010 while in isolation at Ayalon prison near Tel Aviv, in a case Israel tried hard to cover up until it was revealed last week.

Zygier was reportedly set to reveal information about operations conducted by Israel's external espionage agency Mossad, including the misuse of Australian passports by its agents.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation reporter Trevor Bormann, who broke the story on February 12, said Israeli intelligence services were aware his report was going to air with a promo going viral on social media and a news release sent out the previous week.

"My sources told me that it was 'all hands on deck' for Mossad and Israel's internal security service Shin Bet," he said on the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* website.

"Their intelligence had told them that the mainstream Israeli media would most likely grudgingly abide

by the court gag order and that the main task for censors would be to 'pull down' the work of bloggers who would be posting links to our story.

"It did not work out quite like that."

As the story went global, Israel on February 13 admitted it imprisoned a man with dual nationality on security grounds in 2010 who later committed suicide, but did not identify him nor confirm reports he worked for Mossad.

But Israeli lawyer Avigdor Feldman, who met Zygier just days before his death, confirmed that Mossad agents had been involved in the case and said he saw no indication the prisoner was planning to kill himself.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Australian intelligence officials believe Zygier may have been about to reveal Mossad operations, including the use of falsified Australian passports, to either Canberra or the media when he was arrested.

Zygier "may well have been about to blow the whistle, but he never got the chance", said an Australian security official familiar with the case.

Foreign Minister Bob Carr said Canberra first learned of Zygier's

arrest "through intelligence channels" on February 24, 2010.

A week earlier, Dubai police had publicly accused Mossad agents of carrying out a January hit on a top Hamas militant, saying they were looking for around a dozen people with Western passports – four of them Australian.

The move sparked a crisis between Israel and several Western governments, including Canberra, with a resultant freeze in intelligence contacts meaning Zygier's case was not pursued by Australia until his death, the *Herald* said.

Shortly after the Dubai assassination, it emerged that Australia's overseas intelligence agency had been investigating Zygier on suspicion of using his passport to spy for Israel, the *Herald* reported.

Former Australian Secret Intelligence Service official Warren Reed told the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* on February 15 that Israel must have believed Zygier knew something damaging.

"So if he divulged that information to somebody who was from a hostile intelligence service, hostile to Israel, he could damage Israel's national security in not only an immediate sense but ongoing for 10, 15, 20 years," he said. – AFP

Deadly poll violence flares in northeast India

GUWAHATI, India – India deployed hundreds of troops and imposed a curfew on February 13 as the death toll from electoral violence in the northeastern state of Assam climbed to 20.

Most of the deaths have been the result of firing by police, who have been trying to halt attacks by machete-wielding tribesmen opposed to local elections.

"Eight people were killed in overnight clashes, taking the total number of people who have died so far to 20," Bhupen Bora, an Assam state home ministry official told AFP in the state's main

city, Guwahati.

Bora said a curfew had been declared in two violence-racked areas and about 500 soldiers had deployed to help police control the situation in Goalpara district, 120 kilometres (75 miles) from Guwahati.

But despite the strict curfew orders, tribesmen armed with swords, machetes, spears and axes were seen marching through streets in their villages where several houses were set ablaze on February 12.

The Rabha and Hasong tribal villagers, who have been demanding local

autonomy and reject government rule in the area, are protesting against the polls for "panchayat" or village councils that were held on February 12.

They say the elections undermine the authority of their own Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

"We want the right to rule, we believe in self-governance. The government has no right to impose elections on us," Anil Rabha, a tribal leader, told AFP.

With tensions high, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi has announced plans to pay compensation of 500,000

rupees (US\$9000) for the families of those killed in the police firing.

On February 12, security forces opened fire when the tribesmen began setting fire to houses and attacking government officials with bows and arrows.

Northeast India has seen decades of friction among ethnic and separatist groups, although some rebels have recently started peace talks with the government.

More than 10,000 people have lost their lives to unrest in the tea- and oil-rich state of Assam over the last two decades. – AFP

Explorers re-enact epic Antarctic trek

SYDNEY – A team of exhausted but elated explorers successfully recreated Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic survival journey last week, completing a three-day climb across mountains despite a treacherous blizzard.

Expedition leader Tim Jarvis and Barry Gray reached the old whaling station at Stromness early on February 11 after a 900-metre (2950-foot) climb over the mountainous interior of South Georgia.

"It was epic, really epic, and we've arrived here against the odds," said Jarvis, who with Gray completed the climb using the same kind of clothing and gear that Shackleton and his men would have worn in 1916.

"The ice climb at the Tridents is a serious thing and Shackleton didn't exaggerate – with ice at 50 degrees, with one wrong foot, we could have careened

down a crevasse."

Jarvis, 46, said he and Gray, 38, had more than 20 crevasse falls up to their knees during the climb with the latter plunging into one up to his armpits, requiring their one-man support crew to help pull him free.

"These early explorers were iron men in wooden boats and while modern

"... we've arrived here against the odds."

man mostly travel around in iron vessels, I hope we've been able to emulate some of what they achieved," he said.

"There's no doubt in my mind that everyone has a Shackleton double in them and I hope we've inspired a few people to find theirs."

The crossing followed a 12-day re-enactment of Shackleton's 800 nautical mile journey in a spartan lifeboat from Elephant

Island to South Georgia, along with four other members of the British-Australian team.

Jarvis and Gray had planned to make the mountain crossing within 24 hours but were held up by an extreme storm.

They were forced to hunker down on the mountain, resorting to using a modern

tent and sleeping bags to stay alive as snow and sleet and 50 knot winds pounded them on February 9.

"We've had to adapt just as Shackleton and his men did and we had to survive," said Jarvis, adding there were times they thought they might not make it.

Shackleton's 1916 journey to raise the alarm about the sinking of his ship the *Endurance* is considered one of the greatest-ever

survival tales.

During his third visit to the region the explorer's boat became trapped in 1915 and sank 10 months later as it was crushed by the advancing ice.

After living on the floating ice until April 1916, they set off in three small boats for Elephant Island.

From there, Shackleton and five crew made the voyage to South Georgia, reaching their destination 16 days later to face the mountainous trek to the whaling station at Stromness to raise the alarm.

All members of the *Endurance* were eventually rescued.

Shackleton is considered among the great Antarctic explorers, along with Norway's Roald Amundsen, the first man to reach the South Pole in 1911, Australian explorer Douglas Mawson and Briton Robert Falcon Scott.

– AFP

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Dated. February 18, 2013

Ravi Shankar's daughter tells of sexual abuse

NEW DELHI – The daughter of legendary Indian sitar player Ravi Shankar said on February 14 in a video released for a global women's rights campaign that she had been sexually abused as a child by a family acquaintance.

Anoushka Shankar, herself a famed sitar player who used to play with her late father, said she had decided to go public in support of the One Billion Rising campaign against violence against women.

She dedicated her message to an Indian medical student who was gang-raped in a

bus by six drunken men on December 16 in New Delhi, and later died in hospital from horrific injuries.

The crime sparked violent protests and a round of soul-searching in India about the treatment of women.

"As child, I suffered sexual and emotional abuse for several years in the hands of a man my parents trusted implicitly," Shankar said in the message posted on YouTube from her home in London.

"Growing up like most women I know I suffered various forms of groping,

touching, verbal abuse and other things like I didn't know how to deal with, I didn't know I could change," Shankar said.

"Enough is enough. I am rising. I am rising for (the Delhi gang-rape victim) and women like her. I am rising with the women of my country," the US-born musician said.

Events marking the One Billion Rising campaign, timed to coincide with Saint Valentine's Day, took place throughout the Indian capital on February 14, said Kamla

Bhasin, a women's activist leading the campaign in South Asia.

Bhasin said activists would sing, stage street plays, light candles and shout anti-violence slogans.

Annie Raja, general secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women said the group would use events of the day as "pressure tactics" on the government to forge tough laws to tackle atrocities against women.

"The unfortunate gang-rape has given us an opportunity to keep the debate and discussions going," she said. NFIW is the co-organiser of

One Billion Rising programs in several Indian states.

Sydney, Singapore and Manila were among the other cities to kickstart the day of action by One Billion Rising, founded by American playwright and leading feminist Eve Ensler, best known for her play "The Vagina Monologues".

The campaign is calling on one billion people to rise against violence and take a stand for the one billion women – one in three in the world – who will be raped or beaten in their lifetimes.

– AFP

India probes chopper deal

NEW DELHI – India threatened on February 13 to cancel a deal to buy 12 helicopters from the Italian firm Finmeccanica if an official inquiry proved the contract worth nearly \$750 million was secured through kickbacks.

"If we find any evidence of corruption then we will blacklist the company and even cancel the deal," Defence Minister A. K. Antony told reporters in New Delhi.

India's government announced on February 12 that it had ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation to probe reports of alleged bribery of government officials by Finmeccanica.

The order came after Italian media reports said the company's chairman and chief executive Giuseppe Orsi had been detained as part of an investigation into alleged kickbacks paid to Indian government officials. – AFP



French President Francois Hollande strews petals on the memorial to India's founding father, Mahatma Gandhi, in New Delhi on February 14. A focus of Hollande's visit was to secure a US\$12 billion deal to sell Rafale fighter jets to India. It was his first visit to Asia since taking office. Pic: AFP

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Dated: 18th February, 2013

Dhaka approves swift war crimes executions

DHAKA – Bangladesh's cabinet last week approved changes to war crime laws to ensure opposition leaders on trial for alleged atrocities during the nation's 1971 independence war can be swiftly executed if convicted.

The move on February 11 came amid huge demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of people in Dhaka for the previous seven days calling for quick executions of the 10 alleged war criminals being tried on such charges as genocide and rape.

Two others have already been convicted.

The demonstrations began after the war crimes tribunal handed a life sentence to a leader of the largest Islamic party – a term critics condemned as too lenient.

The demonstrators include students, bloggers, academics and journalists.

Cabinet secretary Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan said the cabinet, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, approved the changes, allowing the state and victims to contest the life term for Abdul Quader

Molla of the Jamaat-e-Islami party.

The cabinet also set a 60-day limit for the Supreme Court's Appellate Division to dispose of appeals, Bhuiyan said, meaning someone getting a maximum death sentence can be hanged this year.

"Previously there were no rules on disposing of an appeal at the Appellate Division," he told reporters.

Bangladesh's legal system is notoriously slow with the judiciary overwhelmed by millions of cases – meaning some take years to be heard.

"Now, a new rule has been added under which an appeal (against a war crime verdict) must be disposed of within 45 days. If not possible... the Appellate division will get another 15 days. The total is 60 days," Bhuiyan said.

The parliament "will pass the law within a few days", he said.

The war court, called the International Crimes Tribunal despite having no international oversight, last month sentenced a fugitive Islamic TV preacher to death for murder during

the 1971 war.

On February 5, Molla, Jamaat's fourth-highest ranked leader, who was accused of mass murder, became the first opposition leader to be sentenced.

Eight other Jamaat officials, including its head and deputy head and two senior officials of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, are also being tried by the tribunal. Most of the cases are at an advanced stage.

Both Jamaat and BNP have labelled the cases "show trials" aimed at barring the leaders from upcoming polls. International rights groups have questioned the proceedings.

The life term for the Jamaat-e-Islami party leader triggered nationwide protests with Jamaat rejecting the verdict and its supporters clashing with police.

The government says the trials are needed to heal the wounds of the nine-month war in which it says three million people were killed, many by pro-Pakistani militia whose members allegedly included Jamaat officials. – AFP

Briefs

16 die in attack on Thai army base

NARATHIWAT, Thailand – In one of the most deadly attacks in Thailand's long-running insurgency, scores of heavily-armed gunmen stormed a southern army base on February 13, authorities said, leaving 16 militants dead.

In the unusually brazen assault, 100 militants, dressed in army fatigues and armed with AK47 and M16 assault rifles, attacked the base in Narathiwat province, unit commander Captain Somkiat Pholprayoon said.

A shadowy insurgency has been blamed for the deaths of more than 5500 Buddhists and Muslims have been killed in Thailand's southernmost provinces since 2004.

Aborigines recognised as first Australians

SYDNEY – Australian lawmakers formally recognised indigenous peoples as the country's first inhabitants on February 13.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill was passed unanimously by the House of Representatives and paves the way for formal constitutional recognition.

It comes five years to the day after former leader Kevin Rudd apologised to the nation's Aborigines for wrongs committed since the arrival of British settlers in 1788, including the forced removals of children from their parents.

Cambodian girl dies from bird flu

PHNOM PENH – A three-year-old Cambodian girl has died from bird flu, bringing the country's toll from the deadly virus to six so far this year, the World Health Organisation said on February 13.

Tests confirmed she had contracted the H5N1 strain of avian influenza and "the girl had a history of coming into contact with poultry (in her village) prior to becoming sick", the WHO said in a joint statement with the health ministry.

Former drug cop cleared of graft

SINGAPORE – A former head of Singapore's narcotics police was cleared of corruption on February 14 after a court rejected charges that he demanded oral sex from a contractor to help her win government deals.

The court ruled that the contractor's testimony against Ng Boon Gay, former director of the Central Narcotics Bureau, was inconsistent and unreliable.

Supporters of Ng, 46, applauded after the verdict was announced and he left the courthouse holding hands with his wife, Yap Yen Yen. – AFP

Daw Suu Kyi cook spills the beans in new memoir

By Zon Pann Pwint

A NEW Myanmar-language book titled *Daughter Aung San and My Memoirs*, written by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's former cook U Moe Linn, was launched at House of Media and Entertainment in Yangon on February 14.

U Moe Linn, whose real name is U Myint Soe, worked as the cook at the National League for Democracy leader's house from 1995 to 2010.

He said the inspiration to write the memoir came from his great respect for Daw Suu Kyi.

"I did all the cooking for her starting in July 1995, so I was able to stay close to her," U Moe Linn told *The Myanmar Times*.

"I learned about her nature and her mannerisms, and years later I can still perceive what she feels by observing her behaviour."

U Moe Linn worked as a party organiser for the NLD in late 1988. He was arrested in 1989 and detained in Insein Prison until 1990.

"After my release from prison, I was employed doing yard work at Daw Suu Kyi's house. When she was released from house arrest in July 1995 I started working in her kitchen and prepared meals for her every day," he said.

When Daw Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest



U Moe Linn point the finger at his new memoir. Pic: Aung Htay Hlaing

again in 2003, U Moe Linn carried meals for her without missing a single day of duty until 2010.

"Sometimes I stood next to her as she had her meals and talked with her. After we had lived in the same house for many years, I could tell very well whether she was angry or happy just by looking at her eyes," he said.

U Moe Linn's book includes personal memoirs that have previously been published in Myanmar language in *The Myanmar Times* and *Open News Journal*.

He started sending his memoirs to journals a few years ago when censorship was still strict, but they were always rejected.

"They were dubious

about me whether I was a democracy activist because they thought my memoirs about Daw Suu Kyi were related to politics," he said. "After meetings between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and president U Thein Sein in 2011, the print media became more open and my memoirs started to appear on journals."

Comedian U Mos passes away at 59

By Zon Pann Pwint

AWARD-WINNING comedian U Mos passed away in Yangon on February 13, succumbing to a year-long battle against cirrhosis of the liver. He was 59 years old.

U Mos had been receiving treatment at SSC Hospital on Shwegonedine Road, and had not appeared in any films in more than a year.

However, he had been in the public eye as recently as December 30, 2012, when he won the Best Supporting Actor prize at the Myanmar Academy Awards, for his role in the 2011 film *Htarwara Alintanmyar*.

U Mos' wife Yu Yu Maw told *The Myanmar Times* that the comedian was suffering from liver disease but "died of pleural effusion out of the blue".

"On February 12 he developed breathing problem and was admitted to the hospital. He passed away following morning," she said.

U Mos grew up in Yay Toe Chaung village in Ayeyarwady Region. His stage career started when a travelling theatrical troupe came to his village to perform. He immediately joined the troupe and left with them when they departed the village.

In 1988, when he was 34 years old, he founded his own troupe along with comedian Moe Di. In the

same year he appeared in his first film, *Shat Tae Ta Arr* (So Bashful). He later started getting increasing numbers of supporting actor roles in the film industry.

"From early childhood I developed a love for telling jokes," U Mos told *The Myanmar Times* on December 22, just one week before he won the Best Supporting Actor award.

"So when I had the chance I joined the troupe of famous dancer U Sein Mardin. I started as a curtain puller and was also able to become a standup comedian."

U Mos was known as a talented comedian who was most comfortable performing live onstage. He elicited laughter not only from his jokes but also from his voice and body movements.

"I loved to invent jokes. Whenever I had free time, I just sat and thought up new jokes," he said, adding: "I never read history books or novels, only comedy books."

Yu Yu Maw said that only a few days after he won his Academy Award, his chronic sickness started fuelling rumors that he had passed away.

"I received many calls from his anxious fans and explained that the rumour was not correct. It happened twice after the awards ceremony," she said.

Miss Myanmar International final this week

By Nuam Bawi

THE final round of the Miss Myanmar International 2013 competition will be held at the Myanmar Convention Center in Yangon on February 24.

A spokesperson from Myanmar Tourism Services (MTS), the event's organiser, told *The Myanmar Times* last week that the winner will get the chance to participate in international competitions.

"We will choose a winner who can fulfill the basic requirements of international competitions," the spokesperson said. "We are very satisfied with the contestants who have made it to the final round because we chose carefully from the beginning."

She said the contestants are judged not only on their physical beauty but also on their "general knowledge and talent".

"We will see many talented participants in the final round, including

contestants who can perform with marionettes and show other interesting skills," she said.

The Miss Myanmar International competition was held for the first time last year.

The winner, Nan Khin Zay Yar, participated in the Miss International Beauty Pageant 2012 in Okinawa, Japan, where she won the People's Choice Award, as well as the Miss Internet Award as a result of earning 21.5 million online votes.

It was the first time Myanmar had participated in the Miss International Beauty Pageant in 50 years.

The winner of Miss Myanmar International 2013 will be awarded K3 million, with the first runner-up earning K2 million and the second runner-up K1 million.

The final competition will start at 6:30pm. Tickets are available free of charge from MTS. Call 01-552-642 for more information.

Berryz Koubou to perform in Yangon

MEMBERS of popular Japanese girl band Berryz Koubou will perform in Yangon on March 10, as part of the second Japan Festival in Myanmar.

The festival will be held at the Myanmar Convention Centre from March 9 to 11, organised by Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO Yangon) and Myanmar Professional Service Ltd.

Mr Toshihiro Mizutani,

'Only three or four members will perform at the festival.'

managing director of JETRO Yangon, told *The Myanmar Times* that he asked Berryz Koubou to perform at the festival and "they warmly accepted".

"At this year's festival we will introduce not only Japanese products but also Japanese culture. That's why we added an entertainment program this year," he said.

The seven-member Berryz Koubou formed in 2004 and

won the award for Best Asian Newcomer at the 2008 Asia Song Festival.

However, Myat Mu Khin, operations officer at JETRO Yangon, revealed that the entire band will not be able to perform in Yangon.

"Only three or four members will perform at the festival," she said.

Local television channel 5 Network is showing Berryz Koubou music videos and supplying additional information about the band so that Myanmar audiences can learn more about their music before the concert.

Last year's Japan Festival focused on consumer products rather than entertainment, with about 50 Japanese companies showing their merchandise.

"This year more than 100 Japanese companies interested in doing business in Myanmar will take part in the festival," said Mr Mizutani. "We are trying to promote investment and trade between Myanmar and Japan, and the aim of the festival is to help Japanese companies do business in Myanmar."

— Lwin Mar Htun

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Film director U Tin Yu passes away in Yangon

By Zon Pann Pwint

LOCAL movie director U Tin Yu passed away in Yangon on February 5 at the age of 92. He was best known for directing the classic 1978 film *Nan Twin Ayay Taw Pone* (Royal Campaign).

In his later years he was also celebrated for his dedication to the Myanmar Motion Picture Museum in Yangon, where he served as keeper and patron of the treasury until a year before his death.

"The old director came to museum every Saturday when the museum was open on weekends," director U Aung Soe Oo told *The Myanmar Times* last week.

"He had never been absent from the museum during his years-long self-assignment to look after the building until he was 91 years old."

Inspired by the strong tie between the elderly director and the film museum, U Aung Soe Oo last year started work on a documentary about U Tin Yu's pursuit of filmmaking and his attachment to the museum.

U Aung Soe Oo scripted and directed the film, while U Aung Ko Latt shot the footage, much of which was collected while U Tin Yu was still visiting the museum.

"The film is nearing completion. It is dedicated to director U Tin Yu," U Aung Soe Oo said.

U Aye Kyu Lay, the museum's secretary, said U Tin Yu came to museum from the moment it opened in 1998.

"Sometimes he even came on Sunday, but starting last year he couldn't come because of the health effects of old age," he said.

U Tin Yu was the nephew of pioneering director U Tin Maung and famed actor U Nyi Pu.



U Tin Yu. Pic: Hein Latt Aung

"His relatives had lived at A1 film studio in Mayangone township for generations. They made several films in the studio, and family members filled any vacant roles in the films," U Aung Soe Oo said.

"U Tin Yu grew up in the studio, so it's not surprising that he entered the film industry at a young age with an interest in directing."

His directing debut occurred in 1941, when he was 21 years old, with *Shwe Daung Taung* (Golden Peacock). But even before that, at the age of 18, he recorded the sound for the

film *Hmyar Nat Maung* (Little Cupid), directed by his uncle U Tin Maung.

"U Tin Yu was known as the youngest director of his era," U Aung Soe Oo said, adding: "One of the most distinctive characteristics of U Tin Yu was his attention to detail while directing. He paid great heed to creating special effects. For example, in historic films he never used wood swords painted silver, but instead used realistic-looking iron swords."

U Tin Yu's nephew, director U Thein Htut, said that by nature his uncle was "neat

and tidy".

"When he edited a film, he never failed to wear gloves while touching the raw footage. He would get angry with anyone who touched the film with their bare hands because he didn't want it to get dirty."

U Thein Htut added that U Tin Yu also demanded dedication from his actors.

"When he made the historic film *Nyaung Yan Nyi Naung* (Nyaung Yan Brothers), he asked actor U Myint Maung to lift weights for three months to sculpt his muscles because the actor was very willowy."

U Tin Yu directed more than 60 films and won the Myanmar Academy Award for cinematography for the film *Myitta Shwe Yi* (Gold Water of Love) in 1960.

"U Tin Yu was also excellent at photography, so he won the cinematography award. Perhaps his son, photographer Zaw Min Yu, followed in his father's footsteps," U Thein Htut said.

U Tin Yu helped Japanese director Kon Ichikawa in making the 1956 film *The Burmese Harp*, as well as director Koji Chinou in making *Thway* (Blood Ties), completed in 2003 but still unreleased.

His most famous film, *Nan Twin Ayay Taw Pone* (Royal Campaign), told the story of the fall of King Thibaw. The movie took two years to film, including shots taken at Mandalay Palace, and was edited in Japan.

U Tin Yu was born three days after Myanmar's first feature film, *Love and Liquor*, premiered in Yangon on October 13, 1920. Last year during the 91st anniversary of Myanmar Film Day on October 13, he was given a lifetime achievement award for his contribution to the film industry.

A dream vision of Bagan in a German movie

By Douglas Long

LAST month I embarked on an obsessive quest to watch every feature-length movie directed by German filmmaker Werner Herzog, in chronological order, from his 1967 debut *Signs of Life* up to the present.

Herzog's fifth film, *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), is based on the true story of a mysterious teenage boy found wandering the streets of Nuremberg in 1828. As he learns to speak, Hauser reveals he had spent his life up to that point locked in a darkened room. He is unable to say who had cared for him, or who had brought him to Nuremberg.

As concerned citizens strive to educate the boy, Hauser demonstrates an unorthodox way of looking at the world that at first seems irrational. He repeatedly "fails" tests of religious faith, logic and social conformity, and these failures make him an outcast in the eyes of his "well-adjusted" contemporaries. But it becomes increasingly apparent that the young man is more in touch with his humanity than those who test and judge him.

For a long time Hauser is unable to differentiate dreams from reality, and dream imagery plays an important role in the film. These grainy, eerie sequences are quite striking. In one, people trudge in procession up a steep, rocky mountainside, at the top of which Death awaits. In another, a Bedouin camel caravan moves through the Sahara Desert, playing out a recurrent "story" that Hauser is reluctant to recount because he knows how it begins, but not how it ends.

Hauser dreams of places he has never been, and yet he "knows" what region they are meant to represent. Herzog approaches this incongruity in a typically playful manner. In one scene Hauser tells his adoptive father that he has dreamt of the Caucasus, at which point the film cuts to a shaky, flickering 180-degree pan of a vast plain of green fields, with hundreds of strange, reddish-brown spires towering into the sky.

It took me a moment to realise that I was seeing not a village in the Caucasus, but old documentary film footage of the ancient city of Bagan in central Myanmar.

The shot lasts about 50 seconds. Among the landmarks plainly visible are Dhammayangyi Temple (the largest in Bagan), then Ananda Temple and Thatbyinnyu. As the leftward pan continues, the smaller pagodas in the Myinkaba area loom into sight. The Ayeyarwady River is lost in the distant haze, but the mountains beyond are clearly visible.

As far as I could guess, the footage was taken from the top of Shwesandaw Pagoda,

now a popular spot from which tourists watch sunsets. Given that the movie was released in 1974, and the footage is in colour, I assumed it must have been shot in the 1960s or early 1970s, when few foreigners were traveling to Myanmar.

Intrigued, the next day I Googled Werner Herzog and Bagan, and came up with nothing. Apparently, few had noticed the source of the footage, or had not cared enough to post anything about it.

I decided to email Herzog directly. I had read that he is one of the most unpretentious film directors on the planet, but I didn't necessarily expect a response.

To my surprise, I received an answer less than two hours later, which read: "The footage was shot by Mr Lucki Stipetic during a private trip around 1971 to (then) Burma. The sight was overwhelming and Lucki Stipetic climbed the highest stupa in the middle of the field and did a round shot on Super 8mm." (Mr Stipetic, the younger half brother of Herzog, is a film producer and the official head of Werner Herzog Filmproduktion.)

Unanswered in the email was my question about why this particular shot was used to represent one of Hauser's dreams, and particularly a dream described as having occurred in the Caucasus.

Literal-minded filmmakers might find this wilful "mis-identification" by the director maddening, but I took it as a manifestation of Herzog's concept of "poetic, ecstatic truth," a phrase he coined in his "Minnesota Declaration" to represent a truth that "can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylisation" rather than through facts, statistics or cinéma vérité.

Unlike many artists, Herzog does not seem to feel the need to over-rationalise the content of his movies. In interviews he often admits to not knowing why he included a particular shot in a film, other than explaining that it just felt like it belonged there. In nearly all cases, whether backed by logic or not, it works brilliantly.

Likewise, some critics have observed that Herzog has never provided an "adequate" explanation for why eerie landscapes play such an important role in his films, but he has asserted his belief in the "voodoo of location": the idea, as described by film critic Roger Ebert, "that locations seep into performances and photography and give a special texture to the film".

What better image to provide the "texture" of Hauser's mysterious dream world than the extraordinary landscape of Bagan, regardless of what region of the world the dreamer imagines the vision is meant to represent?

River Phoenix returns to the silver screen

BERLIN — The late River Phoenix made a haunting reappearance on the big screen on February 14 as the last movie to feature the acclaimed star, who died of a drug overdose at 23, was presented at the Berlin Film Festival two decades after he made the picture.

The contemporary Western *Dark Blood* shows what is believed to be the last footage of Phoenix, who died 10 days before he was meant to finish the shoot.

Dutch director George Sluizer, now 80, resumed work on the film in 2009 and narrates missing scenes aloud over still frames in the completed movie.

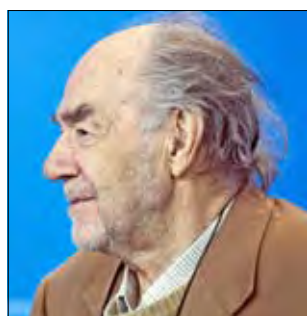
The picture, which came in at just under 90 minutes, tells the story of Boy, a grieving young widower with Native American roots who is living at a nuclear testing facility in the desert after his wife died of radiation exposure.

While waiting for the world to end, he picks up a feuding wealthy couple travelling through the same area (Jonathan Pryce and Judy Davis) when their Bentley breaks down.

Boy is drawn to the attractive wife, the former Las Vegas showgirl Buffy, and refuses to let the couple go, thinking he can convince her to join his one-man doomsday cult.

Pryce told a news conference in Berlin after a screening that drew a mixed reception that he had been impressed with Phoenix, adding, "I love his memory".

"I found him a remarkable young man — I can't believe now looking back that he was only 23 at the time. It's that kind of old head on young shoulders," he said. "But he was absolutely delightful, he was wonderful to work with, he was very committed, very serious about his work."



Dutch filmmaker George Sluizer at the Berlinale Film Festival on February 14. Pic: AFP

Sluizer said he had once joked with Phoenix, whom he called a "gentle actor", about whether he minded working with a director much older than himself.

"And he said: 'George, I respect people who are older than myself because they are wiser and more experienced'," he said.

The picture, shot in Utah and New Mexico, underwent

an odyssey after Phoenix's death when an insurance company took possession of the unfinished footage.

In 1999, Sluizer bought the material to rescue it days before it was slated for destruction and said that after he had a near-fatal aneurysm, he decided he had to finish the project before it was too late.

Phoenix shot to stardom with brooding performances in hits such as Rob Reiner's *Stand By Me* and as a narcoleptic gay hustler in Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* in which he played opposite a young Keanu Reeves.

He was nominated for an Academy Award for the 1988 drama *Running on Empty*.

His sudden death in 1993 of drug-induced heart failure outside Johnny Depp's Los Angeles club, the Viper Room, made Phoenix into a kind of James Dean of his generation. — AFP

Vietnamese noodles a cultural pho-nomenon

By Cat Barton

HANOI — In Hanoi, it is a truth universally acknowledged that the best pho noodle soup is found in the grimmest restaurants, where the staff are rude, the queues long and the surroundings spartan at best.

Pho, a simple soup of beef broth, herbs, spices and rice noodles, emerged some 100 years ago in north Vietnam and has since acquired a global following, beloved by French celebrity chefs and cash-strapped American students alike.

But in Vietnam eating pho is akin to a religious ritual — as the late writer Nguyen Tuan said — and the humble dish, which can be found on every street corner in the capital Hanoi, is integral to people's daily lives.

"I have been eating here for more than 20 years," Tran Van Hung said as he stood shivering in Hanoi's damp winter chill in the queue at the Pho Thin restaurant.

"The staff here is always rude to me. I'm used to it. I don't care," the 39-year-old said, adding that he was raised on the noodles from the unassuming yet renowned establishment on Hanoi's Lo Duc street.

Pho is a Vietnamese staple. While traditionally a breakfast food, it

is now served at all times of day and eaten regularly by rich and poor alike, usually at the same establishments, where it costs around US\$1 a bowl.

"Pho is purely Vietnamese, the most unique, distinctive dish in our cuisine," said chef Pham Anh Tuyet.

The noodles must be handmade, the perfect size and no more than four hours old; the ginger must be char-grilled; the broth of beef bones and oriental spices must have

'Pho is purely Vietnamese, the most unique, distinctive dish in our cuisine.'

bubbled gently for at least eight hours over coals, she said.

"The fragrant perfume of the pho is part of the beauty of the dish," said Tuyet, who is famed for her mastery of traditional cooking.

"No other country can make anything like pho — one of the secrets is the broth, the clear, aromatic broth," she said at her tiny restaurant, tucked away on the top floor of a wood-fronted house in Hanoi's Old Quarter.

The exact origins of pho are obscure and highly controversial in Vietnam.

It is traditionally made with beef broth, but chicken has also been used since the 1940s when the Japanese occupation resulted in a scarcity of beef.

Beef was not common in Vietnamese cooking at the turn of the century — cattle were valuable working beasts — but with the arrival of the steak-eating French colonialists, bones and other scraps became available for the soup pot.

Some experts, such as Didier Corlou, the former head chef at Hanoi's Metropole Hotel who has expounded pho's virtues to international gourmands for decades, argue the dish is "Vietnamese with French influence".

"The name 'pho' could have come from 'pot au feu' — the French dish," Corlou said, pointing out similarities between the dishes, including the grilled onion in the French dish and the grilled shallot in pho.

Another theory, Corlou said, is that as pho was first sold by roving hawkers carrying a pot and an earthenware stove — a "coffre-feu" in French — the name comes from the shouts of "feu!" "feu!" to establish if noodles were available.

Yet another argument suggests pho originated from a talented cook



An employee places pho noodles into bowls at Pho Thin restaurant in Hanoi on January 10. Pic: AFP

in Nam Dinh city — once Vietnam's largest colonial textile centre, where both French and Vietnamese workers toiled — who thought up a soup to please both nationalities.

Many Vietnamese strongly deny any French influence on their national dish, arguing it pre-dates the colonial period and is uniquely northern Vietnamese.

But whatever the real story, "pho is one of the world's best soups", Corlou said. "For me Vietnamese cuisine is the best in the world."

Corlou said that while the main ingredients of pho stay constant, the dish must evolve.

At his three Hanoi restaurants, for example, he offers a salmon pho as well as a pho au fois gras priced at \$10 a bowl.

"You cannot put pho in a museum," he said.

In the past decade, new local

versions of that classic — including fresh rolls made from unsliced pho rice noodle sheets — have also emerged.

And as Vietnam has grown richer, more expensive pho — including a reported \$40 kobe beef version — has appeared.

But beyond adding more meat, there is not much you can do to improve the dish, said Hanoi-based chef and cuisine expert Tracey Lister, who thinks the Vietnamese deserve the credit for their acclaimed noodle soup.

"It is the great dish, the celebrated dish, and I think we've got to let Vietnam have that one," said Lister, the director of the Hanoi Cooking Centre.

"Pho truly represents Vietnamese cuisine. It's a simple dish yet sophisticated. It is a very elegant dish. It's just a classic." — AFP



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Stress-free life for lottery ticket sellers

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A SONG about cold nights in Shan State echoes at earsplitting volume through the streets in a crowded quarter of Yangon, the lyrics offering a marked contrast to the afternoon heat, which is unusually intense for late January.

The loud, tinny music emanates from a mobile cart pushed by Ko Zaw Hlaing Tun. He is selling for the state-run lottery to anyone who wants to try their luck in the draw, and he insists that his line of work is very pleasant.

"People might look down on us because we work on the street, but it's very nice. If I had a job with a higher salary where I was responsible for other employees, there would always be problems," says Ko Zaw Hlaing Tun, owner of the *Ma Har Lar Ban* (Big Lucky) lottery pushcart.

He adds that he has been selling tickets around Yay Kyaw quarter in Pazundaung township for six years. A university graduate with a bachelor's degree in economics, he owns three pushcarts, hiring out two of them for others to operate.

In the past he worked in a garment factory and at a golf course clubhouse, but says, "Selling lottery tickets allows me to work independently and earn an income, and if I'm lucky my customers could become lottery winners."

"The most important thing in life is to be happy, but working in a company means there is limited time for lunch and tea," he says. "I used to work as a group leader in a garment factory and I had to solve many problems for other workers. Now, there's no problem if I start work late or go home early."

Lottery pushcarts first appeared in Yangon about 40 years ago, when the tickets were sold by the government as well as private vendors. In the past four years state-run lottery ticket agencies have increased their advertising, and the number of pushcarts has increased to well over 100 in Yangon.

The tickets are priced by the government at K200 each, but the pushcart vendors, who buy them from middlemen, sell them for K270 to K300.

Most vendors start selling tickets on the seventh day of the month, and after the 20th day they commit to selling all day and even all night until the winners are announced on the first day of the month.

Ko Zaw Hlaing Tun says that on a typical day he starts selling at 7am, takes an afternoon break in



Ko Zaw Hlaing Tun sells lottery tickets in Pazundaung township, Yangon. Pic: Nyein Maung

a teashop, and gets back to work from 3pm to 7pm, after which he heads home.

"We usually sell all the tickets before the drawing each month, and if there are any left we can claim them as our own. If we're lucky, we can even win the lottery ourselves, so there's no stress about the job," he says.

Many vendors decorate their carts with images showing their religious beliefs, but Ko Zaw Hlaing Tun avoids such demonstrations of faith.

"I don't put any pictures on my lottery cart because if I put pictures of Buddha and pray with scented candles, then what about customers who believe in Islam or Christianity who want to buy from my cart?" he says, adding that he prays for the luck of his customers while he is eating because "they are my benefactors who treat me".

Another ticket vendor, U Than Zaw, says praying and making offerings play an important role in his vocation.

"I can always sell more tickets when I pray for customers before

I leave home each morning," he says.

"I came from a family in upper Myanmar, and we believe in Buddha and *nats* [spirits]. I put their pictures up and make offerings with flowers, candles and a cup of boiled water every day, and wish for my customers to be winners."

He says that in the past he has won small prizes in the lottery, but he has never won after praying for his customers because he always forgets to pray for himself.

U Than Zaw sells tickets in Sanpya Market in Thingangyun township and Myin Thar Market in South Okkalapa township.

For three years he worked as a porter at Myin Thar Market but prefers his job as a lottery ticket vendor. Along with his wife, who sells fish paste, they bring in enough money for themselves and their three sons.

"Though I start working in the morning, I can still pick my sons up from school at 12 noon and have lunch with my family at home. The money I make from selling lottery tickets won't make my family rich,

but we're not under financial stress either," says U Than Zaw.

"Some days I don't sell many tickets but I never worry because I know most of them will be gone by the end of the month. And when there are some tickets left over, I feel like they are gifts to me from the spirits."

He adds that lottery ticket sellers must keep their greed in check and restrain themselves from keeping tickets for themselves that could be sold, especially when they have dreams of particular numbers they think might be lucky.

And all vendors are happy to pay out money to customers who win the lottery, without taking any money for themselves, he says.

"When the lottery winners are announced on the every first day of the month, we don't have a chance to eat lunch because we are focused on drawing money for our winners," says U Than Zaw.

"We do this with a clear mind because we don't expect any pocket money from our customers, we just want them to be happy and remain our customers."

Nevertheless, winners often show their appreciation by paying some money to the ticket vendors.

"One of my customers once won K2 million and I ran to tell him the news. He gave me K10,000 even though I wasn't even thinking of asking for anything," he says.

U Than Zaw says many strange things have happened during his time as a ticket vendor, including one incident in which a customer dropped dead when he heard the news that he had won the lottery.

At one point last year U Than Zaw sold every ticket except two by the end of the month. He bought them both for himself, and one turned out to be a K2 million winner.

"Another time I went to a winner's house to tell them the good news, but found that he had already thrown the winning ticket in a trash bag and was on his way to take the

bag to the garbage dump. He had to dig through many bags of waste to find the ticket," he says.

One vendor who rents a ticket cart from the owner is 18-year-old Ko Than Win, who moved to Yangon from Myaung Mya township in Ayeyarwaddy Region.

"I sell tickets in the morning and evening at places designated by the cart owner. When I go back to his house at the end of the day, he calculates the number of tickets sold and the money I have collected. If there's any discrepancy, I have to pay the difference from my own pocket," says Ko Than Win, who has been selling tickets in Tarmwe township for the past two years.

He says the starting salary for ticket sellers is K40,000 a month, and he also gets housing and two meals a day. Since starting, his salary has been raised to K50,000 a month.

"In the past I worked in a paddy field with cows in the heavy rain or under the hot sun, so I prefer selling tickets to farming," he says.

"Now I can listen my favourite songs from my pushcart, and I can walk through the crowded streets of the big city. That's why I don't want to go back to my village."

Ko Tha Win says one of the challenges of his job is keeping his eyes open to make sure no one steals tickets from him.

"Twice I've had to pay the cart owner for tickets that have been stolen, but now I have a lot of customers who can help me track down thieves," he says, adding that it can also be challenging to hold on to the same customers in the long run.

"If they buy tickets from me five times and don't win, they might go and find another vendor because they think I'm not lucky for them. So holding onto to customers also depends on politeness. We have to take care to be friendly so our customers keep coming back," he says.



Who wants to be a millionaire? Lottery tickets for sale at a mobile cart. Pic: Nyein Maung

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Phyo's Cooking Adventure

Phyo cuts through culture to reveal life's true taste

Sinfully delicious fish and pickled tofu

PICKLED tofu (known as *si tohu* in Myanmar) is a type of tofu marinated in chili oil and available at big supermarkets as well as local markets. It is known as an ethnic Shan food, and is one of the basic ingredients for Shan cooking. Although it is a type of tofu, it has a paste-like texture similar to chicken pâté with a salty taste and strong smell. It is eaten as a condiment with

Shan-style noodles, and sometimes with fried rice and steamed rice. Pickled tofu is also one of the main ingredients for popular *meeshay* noodle dishes around the country.

I love to use pickled tofu in dressing to make an Asian-style salad. It can be used like mustard is used in Western-style salad dressing, providing a unique flavour that goes very well with freshly crushed garlic. Adding a dash of sesame oil into the dressing will add a whole other level of enjoyment. This recipe is one that I discovered through experimentation, and I consider it a form of modern Australian fusion cuisine. I invented it when my husband asked me to make Shan food for Sunday brunch, and the best option was pickled tofu based on



Pic: Phyo

Turn down the heat and let it bubble. When it starts bubbling, cover the lid, switch off the heat and leave for five minutes. Serve with plain rice.

Pickled tofu dressing with green veggie leaves
INGREDIENTS

(4 servings)

1 tablespoon of pickled tofu
1 tablespoon of vegetable oil
½ teaspoon of sesame oil
1 big red chili (chopped)
1 teaspoon of sugar
2 teaspoon of fried garlic to garnish
1 bunch of pea sprouts (*paè` ywet*)

PREPARATION

Pick the fresh and new parts of the pea sprouts, discarding the hard and old parts. Wash well. Blanch the green leaves in lightly salted boiling water for a couple of minutes and refresh them. Drain well.

In a frying pan, heat the oil with very low heat and mash the pickled tofu with sugar in the pan. Mix in the chopped chilies. (Alternately, you can microwave all the ingredients for 10 seconds, stir them, and microwave for another 10 seconds. By adding the oil, it should become a paste.)

Chop green vegetable leaves into bite-size pieces, lay them on a big, flat plate, and pour the dressing on the top. Garnish with the fried garlic and serve warm.

Main Tips

Always keep leftover pickled tofu in an airtight jar. The tofu should also be fully immersed in oil. After use, clean the neck and mouth of the jar to prevent it from becoming mouldy. Store it in the fridge for longer use.

QUAFFING QUOTE

"Have a mouth as sharp as a dagger, but a heart as soft as tofu." — Chinese proverb

NEXT WEEK

Next week the Vietnamese feast will begin with fresh, healthy spring rolls that you can roll yourself.

Red Wine

Miguel Torres Gran Sangre de Toro Reserva 2008

The name means "great blood of the bull", and wine lovers should feel no qualms about letting this luscious, spicy, well-blended beast from Spain rage down their gullets.

Score BOX

7/10

Ks 10,800

White Wine

Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo Chardonnay 2011

Heed the omens: This diabolically delicious chardonnay will be a revelation for anyone seeking a wicked pineapple kick to accompany their flame-grilled fish.

Score BOX

8/10

Ks 7580

the ingredients available in Australia.

My experimentation included using pickled tofu in various Western and Asian dishes: pork belly and pickled tofu, pickled tofu dipping sauce, as an ingredient for curry and stir fry sauces, as a paste for soup, and more.

With the following recipe I've had good results using the belly parts of carp, which are soft and oily but become nice and crunchy after frying. You can also use prawns instead of fish.

Fish and pickled tofu
INGREDIENTS

(4 servings)

500g of carp (*nga gyin*)
½ cup of vegetable oil
2 teaspoons of light soy sauce
1 tablespoon of pickled tofu (mashed in ¼ cup of water)
8-10 spring onions (chopped diagonally, using only the white and light green parts)
2 tablespoon of spicy pickled garlic (*Shan kyat thon phyu chin*)
½ cup of water (125ml)

PREPARATION

Clean the fish, wash and drain. Then cut it into small sizes and marinate them in soy sauce for 30 minutes. Heat the vegetable oil in a wok and fry the fish until golden brown. Set aside.

Mash the pickled tofu in ¼ cup of water until it dissolves, and set aside.

Fry the spring onions, chili and pickled spicy garlic until the spring onions are wilted. Then bring the fried fish back to the wok and add the tofu liquid. Stir well and add ½ cup of water.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

The extra 'r' is for ridiculously expensive rice

AS an editor, my first inclination upon arrival at Corriander Leaf Indian restaurant was to uncap my red pen, climb up the side of the building and delete the extraneous "r" from the spelling of "coriander" on the signboard.

But hunger beckoned, so instead my wife and I found a seat at an outdoor table, where we were able to enjoy the evening breeze and revel in an unobstructed view over the adjacent vacant lot, whose chief characteristic was a lonely pile of rubble sitting in the middle.

Food and drink menus were promptly delivered to our table, after which the waitress politely stepped back and gave us sufficient space to contemplate the many options, but remained vigilant and ready to spring forward and take our order when we were ready.

Despite the fact that this waitress appeared to be a trainee — I can see no other reason why another waiter might have been hovering over her shoulder, occasionally whispering helpful hints into her ear — she maintained her friendly



Chicken tikka (not an illustration of the food served at Corriander Leaf). Pic: David Johnson

composure and delivered impeccable service.

A large number of cocktails and other drinks were available, but I ordered my usual beverage of choice, a big bottle of Myanmar beer (K3000), while my wife opted for a glass of the house white wine (K4000), which she deemed "pretty good".

The food menu was also voluminous, offering a wide range of mostly northern Indian dishes as well as a variety of fusion choices. Vegetarians will be very happy with the many non-meat options available.

While big fans of northern Indian food, my wife and I generally find it too rich for excessive consumption. We therefore skipped the appetisers and limited ourselves to two entrées, both of Punjabi origin: gobhi masala (cauliflower in a yogurt-based sauce; K4500) and skewer-grilled chicken malai tikka (K6500). We also added side orders of garlic naan bread (K1800) and steamed rice (K4000).

The food was promptly delivered to the table, and proved to be the highlight of the Corriander Leaf

experience. This is, of course, a good thing — if you're going to get something right while running a restaurant, it might as well be the food.

It was, in fact, delicious and easily among the best South Asian food I've had over the course of a decade of eating in Yangon: The Punjabi gobhi masala was tasty but not overwhelmingly rich, and the chicken was grilled to tender perfection. There was also a slight spicy kick to the food, just enough to redden the skin but not enough to induce sweating.

If I might indulge in a cliché, my compliments to the chef.

While most menu prices were on the upper side of generally reasonable, careful readers might have noted that the price for an order of steamed rice was K4000, which is inexcusable and nothing short of obnoxious. For that price you might expect the rice to be steamed using the healing waters of Lourdes and served with flecks of gold leaf mixed in, but no — by all appearances, it's just a devious way of jacking up the overall price of the meal. — DL

Corriander Leaf

Ahlon Road, Building 12, Yangon International Hotel Compound

Food: 8
Drink: 8
Atmosphere: 6
Service: 8
X Factor: 6
Value for Money: 6

Score BOX

7/10



Ma Shwe Yee @ Chatrium Hotel Chinese New Year Event



U Zaw Zaw and writer @ Paying Respects to Elderly Sport Writers



Sport writers @ Paying Respects to Elderly Sport Writers



Ma Htein Htein and Kyaw @ Nescafe Shake Launch



Mr KoSol and Mr Kitticho @ Chatrium Hotel Chinese New Year Event



Khine Thazin Yu Wah @ Revlon New Counter Opening

Model @ Revlon New Counter Opening



Htet Htet @ Premier Mocha Coffee Lucky Draw



Daw Khin Aye Than @ SR Collage 'American MBA' Gala Dinner



@ Mandalay Export Rum and White Rum Lucky Draw



Dancer @ KMT Dance Studio Opening



Ma Yin Wai Pyone @ Premier Mocha Coffee Lucky Draw



Nadi Wint Naing @ Revlon New Counter Opening



Staff members @ F@X Computer Shop Opening



Ma May Myat Mon Win and Ma Thinzar @ Chatrium Hotel Chinese New Year Event



U Zaw Lwin Moe @ Nescafe Shake Launch



Ma Aye Aye Khine @ Nescafe Shake Launch



Ma Cho Zin @ Mandalay Export Rum and White Rum Lucky Draw

SOCIALITE
WITH NYEIN EI EI HTWE



SOCIALITE started the week at the F@X computer shop opening at Bo Aung Kyaw Road on February 6, followed by the Nescafe Shake launch party at Aung San Stadium. The next day was a busy one for Socialite, with events including SR Collage Gala Dinner at Traders Hotel, as well as the KMT Entertainment and Dance Studio opening at Avenue 64 Hotel at 8 Mile. February 8 will go down in history as the day that Premier Mocha Coffee launched a branch at Junction Square, and the following day Revlon made its own waves by opening a new counter at Kaba Aye Gamonpwint. Socialite ended her week at a ceremony to pay respects to elderly sport writers at Sedona Hotel on February 10.

well as the KMT Entertainment and Dance Studio opening at Avenue 64 Hotel at 8 Mile. February 8 will go down in history as the day that Premier Mocha Coffee launched a branch at Junction Square, and the following day Revlon made its own waves by opening a new counter at Kaba Aye Gamonpwint. Socialite ended her week at a ceremony to pay respects to elderly sport writers at Sedona Hotel on February 10.



Mr Christopher Thaik @ SR Collage 'American MBA' Gala Dinner



Ma Thazin Aung @ SR Collage 'American MBA' Gala Dinner



U Nay Lin Phyo @ SR Collage 'American MBA' Gala Dinner



May Phyu Phyu @ Revlon New Counter Opening



Daw Thiri Khar Nyo @ Parkroyal Hotel Valentine Press Conference



@ Mandalay Export Rum and White Rum Lucky Draw



Kyaw Kaung Htet @ Revlon New Counter Opening



Ma Wut Hmoe and Ma Nay Zin Myint @ SR Collage 'American MBA' Gala Dinner



U Aye Cho @ F@X Computer Shop Opening



U Tint San @ Paying Respects to Elderly Sport Writers



Mr Steven and chefs @ Chatrium Hotel Chinese New Year Event



Kaung Myat @ KMT Dance Studio



Ma Saw Yu Nwe @ Parkroyal Hotel Valentine Press Conference



Mr Laurent Deniau @ Nescafe Shake Launch



Hiwan Paing @ Premier Mocha Coffee Lucky Draw



Ma Moe Myint Thu @ Revlon New Counter Opening

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UNITED PHARMS
Spring Your Healthier You!

ing the way we travel?



Visitors stroll through Songdo's Central Park in the Songdo International Business District, South Korea. Pic: HG Esch/KPF

Understanding the mission of attracting new Western business, Gale has built state-of-the-art, high-tech LEED-certified office buildings, apartments, shops and schools, imported elements from other cities, such as New York's Central Park, and wooed Jack Nicklaus into building one of his iconic golf clubs.

There's a lot of Songdo still to be built, but even as it's under continuing construction, there are signs that point to its becoming an important business and residential hub. Last fall, the United Nations selected the city as the home of its new Green Climate Fund agency. Initial estimates expect 500 employees and their families to move to Songdo.

While Songdo's status as a sustainable city certainly helped in its successful bid to house the Green Climate Fund, so did its proximity to Incheon International Airport.

"You land at the airport and there's a convention centre, a hotel, a golf course," says Lindsay. "Business travellers already live out of conference hotels; now you're seeing conference cities. You still go to Seoul

if you have leisure time, but this is the hyper-efficient movement of people. This is taking the scale of business travel to the extreme."

If accessibility and efficiency are key to the business traveller, the aerotropolis's impact is clear. In some instances, the effect on leisure travellers is equally, garishly obvious.

Across the bridge from Songdo, Incheon airport is building a massive playland to rival Macau and Las Vegas. The actual airport is already a shopper's paradise. It's the number one duty-free airport in the world, with US\$1.53 billion in sales last year, and the halls are lined with 73 high-end stores, including the first Louis Vuitton airport shop.

The broad brightly lit halls feature stores-within-stores. Divided into categories, each massive shop includes several smaller markets inside. The cosmetics store is packed with counters for L'Occitane, Kiehl's and Shiseido. The accessories store includes counters for Furla, London Fog, Burberry, Christian Dior and Chanel. There are floral scents, thick lotions, soft silks, rich leathers, bold

colours, classic patterns. It's luxury overload for every sense.

Outside the terminal, on the man-made island where it sits, development is underway on a mega-resort and casino, a water park, a shopping mall and several hotels. By the end of the decade, this new pleasure carnival will open and connect back to the airport by a magnetic levitation train that will make a 53-kilometre (33-mile) loop around the entire island.

"The concept of an airport is changing," says Min-Jae Chun, director of the Airport City Development Group. "In the past it was just about transportation. If you want to progress, you have to create a destination."

One quarter of the world's population is within 3 1/2 hours of Incheon, and by 2018, the airport anticipates 62 million visitors a year, with 65 percent coming from Japan and China.

"These cities are being built as tourism infrastructure for people who can now afford to travel," says Lindsay. "These are the mega-resorts for the world's emerging middle class."

- The Washington Post

International Airlines

Air Asia (FD)

33, Alan Pya Pagoda Rd, Ground Flr, Parkroyal Hotel, Yangon. Tel: 251 885, 251 886.

Air Bagan Ltd.(W9)

56, Shwe Taung Gyar Street, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 513322, 513422, 504888, Fax : 515102

Air China (CA)

Building [2], corner of Pyay Rd and Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd, Hotel Yangon, 8 miles, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel : 666112, 655882.

Air India

75, Shwe Bon Thar St, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 253597-98, 254758. Fax: 248175

Bangkok Airways (PG)

#0305, 3rd Fl, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 255122, 255 265, Fax: 255119

Condor (DE)

Unit 10-05, 10th Flr, La Pyayt Wun Plaza, 37, Alanpya Pagoda Rd, Dagon Tsp, Yangon, The Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Tel: + 95 1 -370836 up to 39 [ext : 810]

Dragonair (KA)

Unit 1107, 11th Flr, Sakura Tower, 339 Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 95-1-255322

Malaysia Airlines (MH)

335/357, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 387648, 241007 ext : 120, 121, 122 Fax : 241124

Myanmar Airways International(8M)

08-02, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Ygn. Tel : 255260, Fax: 255305

Silk Air(MI)

339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, 2nd Flr, Sakura Tower, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: 255 287-9, Fax: 255 290

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Qatar Airways (Temporary Office)

33, Alan Pya Pagoda Rd. 2nd Flr, Parkroyal Hotel, Dagon Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 01-250388, [ext: 8142, 8210]

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES

Table with multiple columns for flight routes (e.g., Yangon to Bangkok, Yangon to Beijing, Yangon to Frankfurt) and their respective schedules. Includes a legend for airline codes and a disclaimer: 'Subject to change without notice'.

Art and death at Australia's MONA

By Amy Coopes

HOBART, Australia — Eccentric Australian gambler David Walsh is shaking up the sleepy city of Hobart with an unorthodox new museum challenging visitors to a new pact with fermenting, defecating and dying art.

It is an unassuming site for what has fast become one of Australia's most talked-about tourist attractions, a rusted, hulking edifice perched on a hillside 100 steps up from the Derwent River in the island state of Tasmania.

By design, the first sight greeting visitors is a tennis court — maths savant Walsh plays there when the museum is closed on Tuesdays. It is intended to dispel any notion that a contrived act of culture is about to take place.

Once inside, visitors descend several flights of stairs to access the galleries. There are no labels on the walls — all information about the works is stored in an iPod handed out at the start of a visit.

The device is loaded with facts and commentaries about

the art, some from the artist or Walsh himself under a section called "Artwank" — one of many irreverent touches pitched at a younger audience.

Punters can "love" or "hate" each work, aligned to the device via GPS, and at the end of the day can have a record of their tour emailed to them, complete with all the media.

"You come to a conventional museum, walk up the steps through the columns and you're told what to think," said research curator Delia Nicholls.

"[Walsh] wanted you to have a different visceral experience by coming underground, putting a tennis court out the front. He wanted to do this thing where you don't get any clues that you are coming to a museum."

The Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) has shot to prominence in the two short years it has been open, seeing Lonely Planet name Hobart one of the world's top 10 cities to visit in 2013.

Some 700,000 visitors have passed through its doors and



German artist Julius Popp's installation piece 'bit.fall' is displayed at the Museum of Old and New Art in Tasmania. Pic: AFP

big names including Elvis Costello have signed onto its annual MONA FOMA (MOFO) music and art festival, which attracts tens of thousands of tourists to the port city.

"For a little place at the end of the world it's not bad," said Nicholls.

Though centred around the

A\$75 million (US\$77 million) custom-built museum and its A\$100 million collection, MONA is about much more than art — it has an on-site brewery and vineyard, accommodation, restaurant and wine bar.

The tale of its provenance is almost as intriguing as its contents. Legend has it

that Walsh, a collector since childhood of stamps and coins, bought his first serious piece, a carved door, on a gambling trip to South Africa.

Told he could not take his cash winnings out of the country, he asked if he could have the Nigerian palace door instead, quipping: "So I can't take \$20,000 out but I can take your heritage," according to Nicholls.

Walsh, who once described himself as "internal to the point of autism", has built a vast fortune devising gambling algorithms after learning how to count cards while studying science at university.

A self-made millionaire from working-class roots, he claims to have gone broke establishing MONA and it is easy to see why.

Among the works currently on display are pieces by Kandinsky, Basquiat and Warhol, Australian modernists Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd along with Andres Serrano, best known for his controversial *Piss Christ*.

French curator Jean-Hubert Martin, former director of the Centre Georges Pompidou,

helped Walsh lay out his collection and Nicholls said Walsh sought him for his unconventional eye.

Some of the art is living — French artist Michel Blazy's fermenting sculptures using fruit and agar are oddly compelling — while others celebrate death.

Greg Taylor's *My Beautiful Chair* invites the visitor to recline beside a lethal injection machine developed by euthanasia advocate Philip Nitschke as a computer counts down the three minutes 15 seconds to "YOU ARE DEAD".

At 2pm every day a fresh fecal masterpiece is conceived by Wim Delvoye's *Cloaca Professional*, a complex array of transparent urns fed and functioning as a digestive tract — "a work of art that produces a work of art".

Nicholls said Walsh intended MONA to be a challenge — to the senses and the art establishment.

"He hopes that [visitors] see the connections that we have all got, that we maybe help them to see things in a new way," she said. "That's what good art's about." — AFP

Events Flash

Photo festival

A series of photo exhibitions, featuring the work of local and international photographers, is being held at the French Institute in Yangon (340 Pyay Road, Sanchaung township) as part of the Fifth Yangon Photo Festival, from February 13 to 22.

Gangaw show

The 24th group exhibition by artists from the Gangaw village group will be held at Lokanat Gallery (62 Pansodan Street, First Floor, Kyauktada township) from February 18 to 23.

Swing Girls

The Japanese film *Swing Girls* directed by Shinobu Yaguchi will be screened at the Assembly Hall of the Japanese embassy in Yangon on February 22, at 2:30pm. Free tickets (one per person) are available at the embassy until the day of the show.

Ayeyarwady Dreaming

An exhibition of photographs focusing on people living with disabilities, titled "Ayeyarwady Dreaming: Images from Myanmar and Beyond", will be held at New Zero Art Space (Nawaday and Alanpya Pagoda roads, Dagon township, Yangon) from February 22 to 24. Proceeds from sales of the photos will benefit the Disabilities, Education, Livelihood and Training Association (DELTA), which benefits disabled people living in Ayeyarwady Region.

Plus Three

The "Plus Three Stars" exhibition — featuring work by artists Kyaw Min, Shwe Myint and Thar San — will be held at Lokanat Gallery (62 Pansodan Street, First Floor, Kyauktada township) from February 25 to March 2.

Calle de la Salsa

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

Wednesday wine

The Wednesday Wine Club meets every (you guessed it) Wednesday at the QP Inya Shop (30 Inya Road). Taste four or five wines for K10,000 a person. Contact chad.quarto@gmail.com or 09-7321-8711.

Live music

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

Thursday night jam

Enjoy an eclectic mix of free-form music upstairs at 50th Street Restaurant, starting at 8pm.

If you would like your event listed in *Event Flash*, please email editors@myanmartimes.com.mm.



YOUR STARS

By Astrologer
Aung Myin Kyaw

Aquarius

Jan 20 - Feb 18

Going through the process of removing all evil thoughts requires being perfectly honest with yourself, examining yourself dispassionately and training yourself to recognise your strengths and weaknesses. Welcome old friends back into your life, and take advantage of their offers to lend their special abilities toward your quest for success. A new love affair will strengthen your heart.

Pisces

Feb 19 - Mar 20

A healthy mind and the resulting pleasant feelings are fundamental to making the right decisions and taking the right actions. Self-nurturing is not the same as self-indulgence. Learn to take the pressure off while still doing what you need to do. Make knowledge-based creativity part of your daily process. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not be afraid of anything.

Aries

March 21 - April 19

Change is the law; it rises and falls continuously. Now is the time for spiritual growth and expansion, and you should realise how much you can do for yourself in this regard: You can turn mourning into a morning by crafting a harmonious balance with your surroundings. Your social problems stem not from ignorance but from carelessness and lack of attention to the light of wisdom. Have a deep think about making changes in your love life.

Taurus

April 20 - May 20

Count your days by focusing on the golden hours rather than time spent under the clouds. The good news is that the bad news can be turned into good news when you change your attitude. The touch of love should always be on your tongue. Heeding God's call to do something great will result in the dawning of a golden dream.

Gemini

May 21 - June 20

Condition yourself for success. Do not allow unfulfilled desires to disfigure your mind. A successful leap normally comes one step at a time, especially when you can learn to carve opportunity out of adversity. Allow only positive and happy thoughts to pass through your mind. Love should not be played like an emotional game based on erotic desire.

Cancer

June 22 - July 22

You should develop a regular habit of directing your attention to the most important facts of the job at hand. Distinguish between facts, rumours and information, and use whatever might be relevant to the occasion. Adopt a standard that will serve as your guide in conduct and work. Where love is, there understanding is also, and your heart should be self-effacing and demand no consideration.

Leo

July 23 - Aug 22

Steer yourself away from envy and teach yourself to be gentle with gentle people. Let your faith flow free through your emotional difficulties. By taking up a cause you will find it easier to give up material things. Social relationships and social communication are important, but don't allow them to overwhelm other important aspects of your life. An important characteristic of a leader is the ability to make things happen. Love means never having to say you are sorry.

Virgo

Aug 23 - Sept 22

Your love life will soon become more troublesome because of the self-indulgent nature of your lover, who cannot always be relied upon to keep his or her promises. You might have trouble choosing your path because your challenges tend to require multiple aspects of your intellect, and you might have difficulty focusing your work on those areas that best reflect your strengths and your educational background.

Libra

Sept 23 - Oct 22

Distinguish yourself from the rest of the herd by doing your work with excellence. With each step, your influence will increase and you will have more and more opportunities to take the lead. In doing so, lead others as you like to be led. It is very important to make things happen according to your wishes.

Scorpio

Oct 23 - Nov 21

Consider time rather than money, as money lost can be regained, but time lost is lost forever. Take note of the enthusiasm and optimism of everyone you meet, and consider those who possess high levels of both to be potential business partners. Remember the words of Albert Einstein: "The value of a man should be seen in what he gives, not in what he is able to receive."

Sagittarius

Nov 22 - Dec 21

Don't look for the truth, which is an idea that is too big for most people. Proceed as if you are rowing a boat: Just keep pulling on the oars and pushing illusion away from you, and you will make gradual progress toward truth. Do not accept secret information from a close friend at face value. Use your time management skills to make your life easier and more comfortable.

Capricorn

Dec 22 - Jan 19

Common sense in an uncommon degree is what the world calls wisdom. Understand that no one knows everything, and no one knows nothing, but everyone knows something. Learn to face your fears and obsessions with a high degree of calm and rationality, and develop concentration as your normal means of thinking. Do not be unreasonably obstinate, otherwise you will be punished only by yourself.

For a personal reading contact Aung Myin Kyaw, 4th Floor, 113 Th- amain Bayan Road, Tamwe Township, Yangon. Tel: 0973135632, Email: williamaste@gmail.com

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General

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Property

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Employment

UN Positions

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WFP Myanmar is seeking: Grade Duty Station No. of post **Admin Assistant** - Facility Management 1 post in Yangon, Grade: SC-4 Yangon: Minimum secondary school education. Supplemented by technical or University courses in a field related to the post will be an advantage. 3 years of progressive responsible support work experience in general administrative work with 1 year at the level 3 or equivalent. Communicate effectively in both written & oral English. Pls send applications with UNP-11

form to HR Unit, WFP, 3rd Flr, Inya Lake Hotel, 37 Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd, Yangon, P.O. Box 650 (or) email to Myanmar.vacancy@wfp.org COB 18 February 2013.

Ingo Positions

AMDA is seeking a dedicated person to work as a **Agriculture Specialist** for 'Healthy Village Project' at Western part of Pakokku Township, Magwe Region. The application should have the following knowledge, skills and abilities: Have a degree of Bachelor of Science on Agriculture with minimum 3 years experiences (INGO experience would be asset). Must have relevant experience on agriculture training, assessment and M&E. Excellent in English & Myanmar communication (spoken/written). Strong computer skill. Please enclose a C.V., copies of testimonials (references) & passport photo to Senior Officer, Admin/Finance Unit, AMDA Myanmar Country Office 19 B, Thukhawaddy Rd, Yankin. Tel: 578353, E-mail: amda@mptmail.net.mm, Closing date: 19th February 2013.

MEDECINS du Monde (MDM) is seeking **Program Data Assistant** 1 post: B.C.Sc. degree holder (or) B.E (Information Technology) (or) B.Sc. (Computing & Information Studies). Fluent in English. Good command of computer skills, especially in Database technology. Pls submit CV & a cover letter to MDM Country Coordination Office, Yangon: 47-B, Po Sein St, Bahan, Ph: 542830, 09-731-71002. Email: hr.mdmmyanmar@gmail.com

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registration card, Recommendation from police force, education certificate & other related documents to 10, Parami Rd, Hlaing. Ph: 521009, Closing date: 23.2.2013

BURNET INSTITUTE Myanmar is seeking (1) **Project Manager (Education)** - 1 post: Detailed information can be assessed at Burnet Institute Myanmar office. Pls submit an application letter, CV with recent passport photo & copies of relevant documents to: HR Officer: 226, 2nd Flr, Wizaya Plaza, U Wisara Rd, Bahan (OR) Email: burnet.myanmar@gmail.com Closing date: February 22, 2013

Local Position

M A S C O T S HEALTHCARE is seeking (1) **Senior Medical Representative** - M/F 1 Post: Any Graduate (or) B.Pharm. Age under 35. 4 ~ 5 years experience. Good Marketing skills & knowledge. Excellent Interpersonal, Communication, Presentation & Strong Organizational skills. Able to travel outstation. Able to work under stress. Attractive Salary & Incentive. (2) **Medical Representative** - M/F 2 Posts: Any Graduate (or) B.Pharm. Age 20 ~ 27. 2 ~ 3 years experience. Excellent interpersonal & communication skills. Able to travel out-station. Pls submit current CV, educational credentials & all related documents to 15 (B), Taw Win St, Dagon Tsp, Yangon. Ph: 09-730-64477, 09-540-4064, 01 227106 Closing date: 28-2-2013.

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STRAITS Trading Co., Ltd. No.14-16, Shwe Mya Yar Housing, Mya Yar Gone St, Mingalar Taung Nyunt, Yangon. Tel: 01 8619348, 01 8619349 (1) **Sales Representative/Driver** - 2 Posts: Degree Holder, 2 years experience of distribution for sales & marketing. Valid driving license. Good communication skill. Pls submit: a letter of application, relevant documents & CV, Copy of labor registration card & 1 passport photo to email nawshwetl. straits@gmail.com Closing date: 28th February 2013

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MARKETING and Real Estate Agent Company was seeking 3 **English Interpreter**, must interested in marketing & know basic computer, good written and spoken communication skills in English, active & pleasant personality, must understand in customer communication skills, must be spinster, Age under 45. Pls send full resume stating their current and expected salaries, together with a recent photograph, copy of NRC card to: Muditar Housing, 75/2 Quarter, G Flr, B/R-116, Baho Rd, Mayangone. Ph: 01-9669061, 01-9669062 Email: ooliver9@gmail.com

I CARE Medical Group is seeking (1) **Medical Doctor** - F 1 Post: Must have a minimum degree from University M.B.B.S with SA MA registration. Age 23 ~ 28. Good communication in English. Able to use computer, internet & Microsoft application with excellent skills. (2) **Clinic Supervisor** - F 1 Post. Must have a minimum degree from university preferably accounting & marketing background. Age 25 ~ 35. Good communication in English. 2 years experience. Must be able to use computer, internet and Microsoft application with excellent skills. We come the candidates who are trust worthy, self-motivated & outstanding, willing to learn and able to focus on work, be polite & hospitality, able to communicate in courteous manners and must have positive working attitude. Pls submit CV with recent photocopy of relevant certificates & documents, describe

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WE are Int'l Trading and Supplying Company is looking (1) **Sales Engineer** (BE) M/F 2 posts (Electronics/ Mechanical/ Mechatronics) - Age 25 ~ 35. 1 years experience. Proficient in English. Well computer literate (2) **Business Coordinator** - F 2 posts: With Any Graduate. Age 20 ~ 28. 1 year experience. (MFTB and MICB Bank Related Understood for Company Document.) Well computer literate. Pls apply personal CV, recent colour photo, Education Documents, expected salary, working experience & range of proficiency in CV to HR Department: 3(A), May Kha Lane, 7th mile. Mayangone. Ph: 655565, 661142.

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working experience from graduation till present and expected salary to Rm (G-07), G Flr, Diamond Center, Pyay Rd, Kamayut. Tel: 532438, 532447, 09-513-6584.

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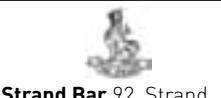
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Ministry of Sports tel: 370604, 370605
Ministry of Communications tel: 067-407037.
Myanmar Post & Telecommunication (MPT) tel: 067-407007.
Myanmar Post & Tele-communication (Accountant Dept) tel: 254563, 370768.
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Inspirational Oscar Pistorius

JOHANNESBURG – Oscar Pistorius is one of the world's most recognisable sportsmen and an inspirational figure the world over after he became the first double-amputee to compete at both the Olympics and Paralympics last year.

The 26-year-old was already a household name going into the 2012 Games in London, after he made history by becoming the first amputee to run at the World Championships in 2011, where he took silver with South Africa's 4x400m sprint team.

The Johannesburg-born runner had both legs amputated below the knee when he was 11 months old after being born without lower leg bones. But he played sports unhindered while growing up, switching to running after fracturing a knee playing rugby.

"You're not disabled by your disabilities but abled by your abilities," he told *Athlete magazine* in a 2011 interview.

His 2011 appearance came after a high-profile controversy about whether he was even eligible to compete against able-bodied athletes, with some arguing that his custom-built carbon-fibre running blades gave him an unfair advantage.

He successfully appealed against an International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) ban against him competing at the 2008 Beijing Olympics to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, although he ultimately failed to qualify.

It was at the Beijing Paralympics, though, where Pistorius supplanted his compatriot, the swimmer Natalie Du Toit, as the most well-known disabled athlete of all time, after he won all three main sprint events, the 100m, 200m and 400m.

He failed to retain all three of his titles in London, though, and was even embroiled, ironically, in a dispute about the length of his rivals' running blades, after he was beaten into silver by Brazil's Alan Oliveira in the half-lap race.

Defeat in the blue riband 100m followed but Pistorius bounced back to take gold with his South African team-mates in the 4x100m relay and storm to victory in the individual 400m, sending the 80,000 Olympic Stadium crowd wild.

However, both Games were a relative failure in terms of performance for Pistorius – he also missed out on the Olympic final and was out of the medals in the relay.

The defeats showed the rapid improvement of other Paralympic athletes, which would help raise further the profile of the Games and its popularity, after for so long being seen as just a sideshow after the Olympics, he argued.

"I think people are going to look back at this Paralympic Games and for the first time really, truly believe that Paralympic sport is not just inspirational, it's hardcore sport," he said as the Games closed in the British capital.

"It's full of triumph, sometimes it has disappointment, but that's what we look for in sport. We want it to be competitive and that's what it's been about."

Such a comment was in keeping with Pistorius' philosophy in life and his attitude towards his own disability, which has proved no bar to success.

At high school, he was so good that his personal fitness coach said she was unaware for six months that he ran on prosthetic legs.

Last December, he ran against – and beat – Arab horse Maserati in a race over 200m in the Qatari capital, Doha, and again saw his victory as a way of challenging perceptions about disabilities around the world. – AFP

China a major drug supplier, says WADA chief Fahey

LONDON – China remains the "major source of supply" for illegal performance-enhancing drugs, World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) president John Fahey told AFP in an interview on February 11.

His comments came after WADA director-general David Howman told a news conference at a London hotel on February 11 that "99 percent of illegal substances come from China".

Howman added the "same bad guys" were involved in both match-fixing and the supply of illegal drugs because of the huge sums of money involved in each case.

Fahey said progress had been made with Chinese authorities but that more needed to be done.

"On numerous occasions we've made representations to CHINADA (the Chinese Anti-Doping Agency)," Fahey told AFP.

"I've had discussions with the (Chinese) sports minister and I'm conscious of certain action being taken," the 68-year-old Australian added.

"We've certainly asked for their co-operation and we are conscious of many suppliers being shut down as a result of our representations in the past."

"That's not to say it still isn't the major source of supply – we know it is," Fahey insisted.

WADA's effectiveness was called into question on February 11, by Swiss-based UNI Sport PRO, an umbrella group of national and international sporting associations, who slammed its handling of the Lance Armstrong scandal.

The disgraced American cyclist, who recently admitted to being a serial drugs cheat, was banned for life and stripped of his seven Tour de France victories following an investigation by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA).

Meanwhile, the Australian Crime Commission report said use of prohibited

products was commonplace across multiple sporting codes, sending shockwaves through Australia – a country where sport has a central role in national life.

"Regrettably, the World Anti-Doping Agency and its stakeholders are failing in their mission to protect clean athletes," said a UNI Sport PRO statement.

But Fahey insisted there was more to catching drugs cheats than dope tests and that there was no substitute for government action.

"We (WADA) have made some significant progress since our inception (in 1999). We now have a methodology that's far smarter."

"Once upon a time it was test, test, and test and if you do enough tests you'll pick up enough cheats. It's a waste of time just testing anybody. You need to test the likely cheats."

"We've got to use other methods (than testing) to bring them under the (WADA) code. Possession or admissions and so on."

"All of that's happening because we are seeing many countries working with law-enforcement agencies and my own country (Australia) demonstrated that again last week. We can't see enough of that."

"But is the problem still as big as it ever was? There's no doubt it's still a massive problem," he said.

Fahey's mandatory maximum six-year term as WADA president ends this year.

However Fahey, a former premier of New South Wales and for the past two years chairman of an inspectorate supervising the rebuilding of flood-damaged roads and bridges in Queensland, said he'd no intention of returning to front-line Australian politics.

"I learnt long ago that you never go backwards," said Fahey, who also played a key role in Sydney's successful bid for the 2000 Olympic Games. – AFP



South Africa's Paralympic gold medallist Oscar Pistorius was arrested early on February 14 for allegedly shooting his girlfriend after mistaking her for an intruder. Pic: AFP/Johannes Eisele

Fans deaths casts shadow over Dortmund draw

DONETSK – Germany defender Mats Hummels's late header gave Borussia Dortmund a Champions League lifeline with a 2-2 draw at Shakhtar Donetsk in last 16, first-leg, clash on February 13.

However, Dortmund's impressive result will be overshadowed by the deaths of five fans and 12 injured when a plane from Odessa, south Ukraine, carrying 45 people crashed while landing at Donetsk airport, just hours before kick-off.

A minute's silence was held as a mark of respect.

Dortmund twice came from behind and were heading towards their first European defeat of the season before centre-back Hummels powered home from a corner, three minutes from time.

"It is important that we are going into the second leg level and a 0-0 would see us through," said Hummels.

"Certainly there were a few dangerous moments in defence, but against such an attack-minded team you can never avoid this."

"We were twice behind, so that is a fantastic consolation result."

Donetsk captain Darijo Srna's free-kick was cancelled out by a first-half equaliser from Dortmund striker Robert Lewandowski before Brazilian Douglas Costa restored Shakhtar's advantage 22 minutes from time.

Hummels' header puts Dortmund in pole position to reach the quarter-finals for the second-leg at Borussia's Signal Iduna Park stadium in a fortnight.

Having beaten Real Madrid, Manchester United and Ajax to win Group D, Dortmund came perilously close to joining current holders Chelsea in suffering defeat at Shakhtar's notoriously

tricky Donbass Arena.

"We were punished for a couple of defensive mistakes, which was annoying," said Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp.

"2-1 wouldn't have been a bad result to take back to Dortmund, but the 2-2 was very important for the team's mood before the second leg."

Shakhtar coach Mircea Lucescu said he considered the draw a fair result.

"It's a pity to lose the lead in the last minutes but the result seems to be fair," Lucescu said.

"Borussia are a very strong and well-organised team, while we looked unimpressive in the beginning because of lack of match practice."

"But the finals stages showed we are capable of getting a positive result. In the next few weeks we will try to improve on our fitness." – AFP

Retain wrestling, Greece tells IOC

ATHENS – Greece threw its weight behind a campaign last week to keep wrestling, a sport which has survived from the ancient Olympics, on the Games programme.

Greek Sports Undersecretary Giannis Ioannidis on February 14 called on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) not to remove the sport from the 2020 programme.

In a letter to IOC president Jacques Rogge, Ioannidis said he expressed the feelings "of all the Greeks, but also the respect of our people and its sports history to keep the sport of wrestling in the Olympic Games programme".

The 15-member Executive Board of the IOC on February 12 voted to remove wrestling from the Olympic schedule.

"With great surprise and great sadness we learned of the decision of the IOC Executive Board to remove the sport of wrestling from the program of the Olympic Games of 2020. The sport of wrestling is connected with Greece and the ancient Olympic Games," Ioannidis wrote to Rogge.

The Greek official added that wrestling has a huge global appeal,

noting that the International Wrestling Federation has 180 countries as members.

"The history, the tradition and the social acceptance that marks the sport should not be sacrificed on the altar of media ratings and marketing," Ioannidis said.

On February 13 the Hellenic Olympic Committee announced they fully support the Greek wrestling federation's fight.

"This is one decision that is clearly at variance with the history of the Olympics and sport in general," it said.

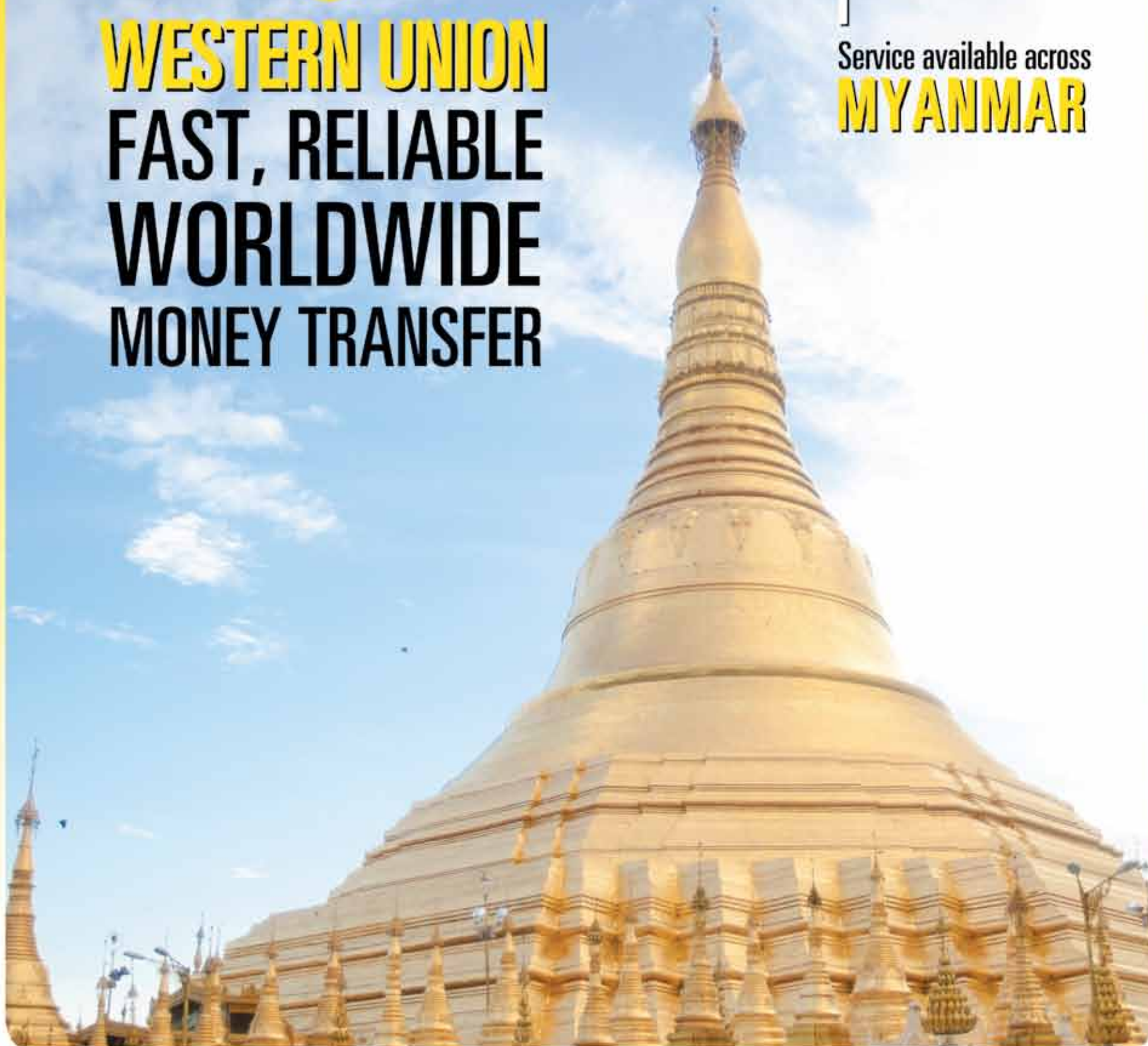
"There should be a revision of this decision and the Hellenic Olympic Committee will support with all its forces, any effort in this direction."

Greek wrestling federation president Kostas Thanos had already condemned the decision by the IOC as "sacrilege".

"Wrestling is a sport that is identified with the Olympics and we cannot throw away such a symbol. The way they are going they may even remove the name Olympics," Thanos said in a radio interview. – AFP

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Amateur boxers feature in Yuzana Garden City event

By Aung Si Hein

A TWO-day Myanmar traditional boxing event was held at Yuzana Garden City in Yangon's Dagon Seikkan township on February 9-10 to help nurture young boxing talent.

As well as promoting young generation boxers, the event was also held to mark Union Day on February 12 with competitors from the states and regions participating in the event.

The event included matches for professional boxers, but there were also six three-round bouts open to young amateurs.

Organiser Ko Ye said the unusual decision to hold the event in the open air – spectators were seated in a shaded area around the makeshift boxing ring – was deliberate.

“Many famous boxers have a connection to Yuzana Garden City because this is where they started their careers,” Ko Ye said, adding that he hoped the venue would help to attract young boxers.

“Boxing events are usually held at Theinbyu Stadium and Myaw Sin Kyun but those venues do not have



The boxing event in Yuzana Garden City last week was unusual for two reasons: it was held in the open air and there were young amateurs on the program. Pic: Boothee

open bouts for amateurs,” he said.

The young amateurs from Yuzana Garden City who took part in the event were not allowed to continue

fighting if cuts were opened on their faces.

In a remarkable four-round bout on February 10, Shan Gyi from Aphyu Yaung Thway Thit club

demonstrated great fortitude to achieve a draw with Thet Ko from Waso club.

While Shan Gyi often attacked with his knee, Thet

Ko depended mainly on his right fist, enabling him to dominate his opponent, who called for a rest in the first round.

In the second, Shan Gyi relied on his fists to defend, but his knee attack later proved insurmountable for Thet Ko. The third round saw Shan Gyi as a southpaw and not raising his knee as Thet Ko appeared to be dazed.

Shan Gyi was down for a count twice in the fourth round. His face was bleeding and badly bruised but he was too strong to be knocked down.

The next bout, a five-round contest, saw Kyae Zin Phyo from Aphyu Yaung Thway Thit knock down former states and regions champion Kyaw Tint in the second round.

Both cautiously cut short each other's approach by the use of kicks that threw them on the floor several times.

Kyaw Tint had a disadvantage as he had not competed for several years and was eventually worn down by the barrage of blows from his opponent.

The last bout ended in the third round, when Aung Kyaw Tun from Naga Man club floored Wunna from Aphyu Yaung Thway Thit.

Briefs

Min Min takes singles title

MIN Min won the men's open singles title, and K150,000 in prize money, at the National Tennis Championships held by the Myanmar Tennis Federation at its Theinbyu Center on February 5-9.

Among the winners of the remaining age group categories, Myint Oo took the singles title for men aged over 60, winning K50,000.

– Kyaw Zin Hlaing

Sumo legend to get posthumous Japan award

TOKYO – Japan is to give one of its highest honours to a late sumo wrestler, Taiho, who dominated the sport in the 1960s.

His name is synonymous for many Japanese with the high energy growth and economic excitement of a decade when sumo wrestlers were unconditionally respected as heroes.

Top government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said the government had decided to grant Taiho the “People's Honour Award”, which is given to figures who inspire the nation.

Taiho, whose real name was Koki Naya, died of heart failure in hospital in Tokyo last month. – AFP

India's Pankaj makes history at Welsh Open

NEWPORT – Pankaj Advani on 14 February became the first Indian snooker player to reach the quarter-finals of a world ranking event when he defeated Graeme Dott 4-1 at the Welsh Open.

The 27-year-old from Pune followed up his 4-3 defeat of Shaun Murphy by knocking out another former world champion to set-up a last-eight clash against Judd Trump. – AFP

Zayar Shwe Myay succumb to surprise loss in Mandalay

By Si Thu Lwin

YADANARBON fans left Ba Htoo Stadium satisfied on February 9 after watching the Mandalay side demolish neighbouring Zayar Shwe Myay.

The visitors from Magwe Region went into the game riding high after four straight wins and were no match for the home side, who had taken just four points from their first four games.

The win gave Yadanarbon fans hope that their season was back on track after a shaky start.

“Today's match was very promising. Yadanarbon mainly played with its young local players rather than foreign players. I'm very satisfied that we won 2-0 against Zayar Shwe Myay, which was until now undefeated. I think our fans will be happy if the players can perform like they did today in every match,” said Ko Myo Zaw, who regularly attends Yadanarbon matches.

Yadanarbon attacked from the start against its fierce rival, which only just managed not to concede an early goal. The breakthrough came in the 26th minute when new recruit Kaung Sithu headed home a Yan Aung Win free kick.

Yadanarbon continued to attack strongly during the second half and Zayar Shwe Myay looked to be falling apart, with striker Sar Sar almost completely ineffective against the Mandalay team's defence.

Yadanarbon got its second goal in the 57th minute when Yan Paing headed in a Paing Soe cross.

Zayar Shwe Myay had a few late chances but goalkeeper Thiha Sithu was more than up to the challenge of keeping a clean sheet.

Despite the loss, Zayar Shwe Myay remains equal top of the table with Yangon United, while Yadanarbon sits in fifth place, ahead of Zwegabin United on goal difference.

– Translated by Zar Zar Soe

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In commemoration of
**THE 52ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL DAY &
 22ND LIBERATION DAY OF THE STATE OF KUWAIT**

Sponsored by the Kuwait Embassy, Yangon. 20 February, 2013



Message of His Excellency Mr. Essa Y. Al Shamali,

Ambassador of the State of Kuwait in Myanmar

Dear Friends,

It is the month of rejoicing and celebration as we observe the twin occasions of the Independence Day and the Liberation Day of the State of Kuwait.

Indeed, it gives me much pleasure to share these momentous occasions with the friendly people of Myanmar.

My country, Kuwait, under the sagacious leaderships of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince and His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister have made tremendous progress in its more than five decades of existence as an independent and sovereign country.

I would like to recall here, with great pride and gratitude the unstinted support of the brotherly and friendly countries that stands by Kuwait as it marches to progress and prosperity.

I feel very happy and pleased to reiterate here that Myanmar is one of those friendly countries whose positive and commendable role in modern Kuwait's development will always be remembered and valued with deep appreciation and gratitude.

On this happy note, I would like to recall here our traditionally friendly bonding as active members of the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Our friendly ties are based on shared principles and values emanating from our common faith and belief and our strong conviction in the rule of law and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all nations.

Dear Friends,

Both, Kuwait and Myanmar are ardent proponents of democratic principles and values and I am proud to say that institutionalized democracy enshrined in the constitution of Kuwait and embodied in a popularly elected parliament is a goal that is pursued vigorously by the Kuwaiti people.

That our two countries, despite all adversities, have progressed to this stage, is a testimony of our resolute commitment, faith and above all,



Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah
Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait



H.H. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah
(Amir of the State of Kuwait)



Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah
Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait

our love for freedom and our allegiance to our motherland.

Democracy without economic strength is not sustainable and therefore the Government of Kuwait pursues an aggressive economic policy which has helped in keeping the economy vibrant despite the socio-economic and political turmoil all around. Kuwait takes pride in the fact that in its stride to progress and development, friends of Kuwait like Myanmar have always played an important and positive role.

Kuwait has consistently extended its economic support to its friends through Kuwait Fund. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development is a proud partner in progress through its assistance for development projects in the agriculture and energy sectors in Myanmar.

Dear Friends,

Our relationship has reached a new dimension today under the wise and farsighted leaderships of our two countries. It is not measured in terms of how much one has done for the other. Rather its depth is measured in terms of the principled stand the two countries share when confronting matters of regional and

global interest.

Dear Friends,

History beckons us to go much beyond our current ties. Our two friendly countries have the opportunity to expand our bilateral relations further. Kuwait would welcome an increase in the volume of two-way trade between the two countries. Myanmar, with its current level of industrial growth and development, has the scope to widen its export basket for Kuwait. In the area of trade, the trade volume reached



Mr. Essa Y. Al Shamali

to \$ 6,784,176 in 2010 and Kuwait imports amounted to \$ 6,726,327 while exports reached \$ 57,849. The main commodities imported from Myanmar are frozen fish, beans, peas, cotton and textile, while Myanmar imports polymer and clothing and footwear, household goods and cars from Kuwait. The volume of trade between the two countries was \$ 2,794,533 in 2001 but it more than doubled to reach \$ 6,784,176 in 2010.

I can assure my friends here that Kuwait will be more than happy to encourage this friendly country penetrate the GCC market through Kuwait. This obviously requires a more dynamic and aggressive thrust by the business communities of our two countries.

Dear Friends,

I see a very bright and promising opportunity for joint venture investments by the enterprising entrepreneurs of our two countries in various sectors, particularly in food security, garments and petro-chemical products. While stressing on more meaningful exchange of visits between the businessmen of our two countries, I welcome the Federation of Myanmar Chambers of Commerce and Industries to explore the opportunities in Kuwait. A single country

Myanmar Trade Fair could be a show case of Myanmar as an emerging economic player.

At the same time, Myanmar could come up with feasible projects in the different sectors to attract the concerned Investment authority in Kuwait which have global investment involvement.

In the context of promoting cooperation and trade between the two countries, both countries signed agreements for economic and technical cooperation for mutual encouragement and protection of investments, in addition to the memorandum of understanding signed between the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Myanmar and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Kuwait.

Kuwait has already invested in the Myanmar infrastructure development strategy through funding of projects in two major areas-Energy and Agriculture.

Kuwaiti Non-Government Organizations too could play a commendable role in promoting socio-economic welfare of people from economically challenged background in Myanmar.

To complement the economic cooperation and create better understanding we should promote greater social interaction between our two countries through people to people contacts. The media and civil society members can play a vital role as part of multi track diplomacy in connecting the people of our two countries. Cultural exchanges between the two countries can also have a positive impact in this aspect.

Exchange of visits by the leaderships of our two countries have paved the way for a more fruitful cooperation. I look forward to regular exchange of visits by leaders of the two countries to take this relationship to new heights.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Government and the people of Myanmar for the warm hospitality and valued consideration shown to me and my colleagues in the Embassy.

I look forward to the further expansion and consolidation of our fraternal and friendly relations.

Thank you.

Kuwait at a glance



KUWAIT TOWER - SYMBOL OF MODERN KUWAIT.

Official Name	State of Kuwait (Dawlat Al-Kuwait)
Capital	Kuwait City
Location	North West corner of the Arabian Gulf, between Latitude 28.45° and 30.05° North of the equator and between Longitudes 46.30° and 48.30° East of Greenwich
Area	17,820 sq.km. (6,960 sq. miles)
Boundary	The Borders' length is about 685 km of which 195 km
Land boundaries	Total 490 km

Topography	Mostly flat, sandy desert. The northern part of the country is characterized with the presence of many dispersed hills within while the southern part of the country is generally flat
Population	3,566,437 (2012 estimate)
Demonym	Kuwaiti
Education	Compulsory from ages 6-14 and free at all levels for Kuwaitis
Language	Arabic but English is widely spoken
Ethnic Groups	Kuwaiti: 33.4%, other Arabs: 34.8%, Asians: 24.3%
Religions	Muslim 85%, others 15%
Rate of Literacy	93.3%
Government Type	Constitutional Monarchy
Administrative Division	6 governorates
Legislative Branch	Unicameral National Assembly consisting 50 seats. Members are elected by popular vote to serve four year terms
Economy	Open market economy with proven crude oil reserve of about 96 billion barrels
GDP estimate (2011)	\$ 150 billion
Per Capita	\$ 38,984
Exports	Oil and oil refined products, fertilizer, petro chemical products
Imports	Food, clothing, manufactured goods, pharmaceutical products, machinery, newsprint
Trade (201 Oest.)	Export: \$ 63.27 billion Import: \$ 21.61 billion

Coast line	499 km
Maritime claims	Territorial, Sea: 12 nm
Natural resources	petroleum, fish, natural gas
Currency	Kuwaiti Dinar (KD 1= US \$ 3.50)
First settlement	1613
Anglo-Ottoman Convention	1913
Year of independence	Although Kuwait has been as independent entity for over two centuries, it earned International Recognition as a sovereign State in June 1961
Constitution	Approved and promulgated in November 11, 1962
First Ruler	His Highness Sheikh Sabah-1 Bin Jaber (1756-1762)
Present Ruler	His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (2006-)
Crown Prince	His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah
Prime Minister	H. H. Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah
National Flag	Four coloured flag. The colours are derived from a poem by Safy Al-Deen Al-Hil. The Green stands for the greenery, the white for peace, the red for the Martyrs and the black for oil wealth.
National Emblem	A falcon with outspread wings embracing a dhow Sailing on blue and white waves symbolizes Kuwait's maritime tradition.

National Anthem	"Kuwait, my country", was composed by poet Meshari Al-Adwani.
The National Salute	The first 6 bars of the National Anthem.
The National Day	25th. February
Liberation Day	26th. February
Seasons	4 seasons: Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn
Climate	The weather of Kuwait is characterized by long, hot and dry summers and short, cold and occasionally Wet winters
Ports	There are 4 ports: Mina Ahmadi, Mina Abdullah, Mina Al-Zoor, Mina Shuaiba
Islands	There are 9 Islands: Wara, Bubiyan, Miskan, Failaka, Auhha, Umm Al-Nami, Kubbar, Qaruh and Umm Al-Maradim
Territorial Waters	5625 sq.km.
Flora and Fauna	400 species of wild plants and flowers grow in Kuwait. There are 20 species of native birds. Although many of the desert rabbits, wolves and gazelles have long become extinct, yet rodents, Lizards and other animals still survive.
Main Occupation	Pearl Diving and fishing have been replaced with Trading and business enterprises.
Main industry	: Oil refining and processing industry and petro chemical industry.
Touristic Enterprises	The waterfront, the Yacht Club, the Swimming Complex, Kuwait Towers, Entertainment City, The Musical Fountain, Ice Skating Rink, Sea Clubs, Recreational Parks and the Sea Beaches.



Foreign policy of Kuwait

THE cardinal principle on which the foreign policy of Kuwait is based had been enunciated by the late Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait when he declared that, "Kuwait lives under the protection of Islam as its religion, Arabism as its homeland, cooperation as its strategic path, tolerance as its motto, fraternity as its guidance, constitution as its modus operandi, justice as its rule, progress as its responsibility and peace as its goal".



Kuwait at the Gulf Cooperation Council Summit meeting.

The objective of Kuwait's pursuit of diplomacy is based on a pragmatic and balanced approach and is conducted in accordance with the government's philosophy and the interest of the State. Kuwait adheres to a policy, which is characterised by clarity, straightforward and quiet diplomacy. It strives to strengthen cooperation with all countries on the basis of mutual respect and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States. It advocates the use of peaceful means in resolving all problems between States in accordance with the principles of right and justice, away from conflicts, sphere of influence and International blocs. At the same time, Kuwait's policy is concerned with the safeguard of her independence and sovereignty and her freedom of political decision. This policy stems from her belief in a common Arab destiny towards

the development of relations with its fraternal Arab States. Hence, Kuwait plays a significant role in the progress of the Arab League and its bodies and gives her wholehearted support to the Palestinian cause, which is at the core of Arab cause. Kuwait is an ardent advocate of Pan Arabism and its policy and interest in the Arab world is motivated by its strong adherence to the principles of Arab nationalism. Indeed, for Kuwait, Arab solidarity is not an outfit to be put on and off to suit its interest. It is blood in the veins, a candle in the heart, heritage passed by forefathers, ambitions and security, language and religion, history and geography, air and water, an undiluted and a never ending inter-twined interest. Kuwait always has a throbbing heart for the concerns of

the Arab nation. Its hands are always extended towards them. It is an active and vocal member of the Arab League and plays a leading role in promoting economic prosperity in the region through Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. Kuwait is vocal in its demand for withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from all Arab lands illegally and forcibly occupied by Israel. Kuwait has been a firm supporter of the Middle East peace process since the Oslo accords. At the 1994 donors' conference, Kuwait was one of only three Arab states to contribute to the Palestinian Authority, committing itself to \$25 million dollars in development aid to the Palestinian people, in addition to the millions of dollars sent by Kuwait-led

multilateral funds for projects in the West Bank and Gaza. Kuwait again contributed to Palestinian development at the second donors' conference, held in Washington in 1998. Kuwait has declared its support for the Oslo process, has participated in all multilateral meetings related to the peace process, and has lifted the tertiary and secondary boycotts on trade with Israel.

Being a Gulf State, Kuwait played a pivotal role in bringing about the unification of the Gulf Emirates. The formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a brainchild of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, was perhaps one of the most important landmark of Kuwait's foreign policy. The idea of floating such a regional forum emanates from a common perception and outlook on regional and other matters by the Gulf States. His Highness the Amir of Kuwait conceived such a forum to promote cooperation and co-ordination amongst the member States in all spheres not only for their mutual benefit but also for the whole Arab nation.

On the Islamic level, Kuwait ardently believes that the progress of the Islamic Ummah is linked with the cooperation and co-existence of the Muslims in a spirit of tolerance and fraternity. Since the dawn of Kuwait's independence, this country exerted strenuous efforts, particularly under the sagacious guidance of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the architect of Kuwait's foreign policy and the Amir of the State of Kuwait, and the prudent leadership of His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister, to fulfil Kuwait's strong commitment to the welfare and progress of the Islamic Ummah. This was aptly reflected when it hosted the 5th. OIC Summit meeting in January 1987.

On the International plane, Kuwait's foreign relations have always been balanced and based on openness. It is worth mentioning here that Kuwait was the first

Gulf country to have recognised and established diplomatic relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union, in the cold war era.

This candid approach in the conduct of its relations with other countries, based on cooperation, understanding and continuity, is not a mere coincidence or a passing phase that might be altered with a change of faces in the government. Rather, it is a philosophy felt deeply by the government and is based on self-confidence and mutual trust between the citizens and the government of Kuwait.

Kuwait aspires to a new approach in International Relations moulded by a New World Order, which is based on international legitimacy and a rejection of the principles of using force, terrorism and aggression to alter the status quo.

It is an ardent believer in promoting international peace, security and stability. On this note, Kuwait hosted a number of international and regional summits including the GCC summit, the OIC summit, Arab Economic and Social summit and Asian Cooperation Dialog summit.

Further, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, the architect of Kuwait's foreign policy makes regular visits to different countries to promote international peace and security.

Kuwait is currently in the midst of a transformation, as it considers its place in the era of globalization. The Kuwaiti people recognize the nexus between domestic and foreign policy, and have undertaken tremendous political and economic decisions that prepare the country for sweeping reforms. In recent years, Kuwait has deepened its commitment to democratic progress. It has expanded the voting franchise; embarked upon an ambitious plan to privatize the state-centered economy; and opened up the country to direct foreign investment. Kuwait is negotiating with foreign companies to invest in the upstream oil sector; and has closed the loopholes in laws

protecting intellectual property rights. All these steps are aimed at maintaining Kuwait's political and economic viability throughout the new millennium.

Kuwait strongly advocates the continued role of the United Nations in ensuring international peace and security. Kuwait calls for international cooperation to protect humanity, individuals and groups from the dangers of ethnic, racial and State terrorism and all forms of concomitant threats and blackmails.

At the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other multilateral agencies, Kuwait is a major donor. Historically it has contributed 5 per cent of its GDP to economic development of other countries; this places Kuwait near the head of the list of donor countries as a percentage of GDP.

Kuwait's strong adherence to what it regards as the basic principles of her external policy has been put to severe tests on a number of occasions.

Kuwait does not compromise its principles and honour. His Highness the Amir had once said in October 1985 that "our decision will remain free and we will not yield to blackmail, terrorism and emotionalism".

Kuwait has strong conviction that World peace in general and regional peace, stability and prosperity can only come through a rational approach to divisive issues which could be and should be resolved amicably through discussions.

In this aspect, it has tremendous faith on the United Nations and its principles and charters, as a means of sustaining international legitimacy, peace and security of all the countries.

Therefore, it is no mere co-incidence that Kuwait shares the belief of all peace loving countries that adherence to the UN charter and respect for the principles and objectives of the United Nations Security Council will usher in a new era of peaceful cooperation and co-existence, stability and security and progress and emancipation in the Arab Gulf Region. ■

Parliamentary life

DEMOCRATIC practice in Kuwait is imbued in the Kuwaiti entity itself.

His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, has reaffirmed Kuwait's adherence to democracy when he said that "Democracy is deeply rooted in ourselves and is not imposed on us". The Kuwaiti people has experienced democracy since a long time and it is viewed as a positive development in Kuwait's march to peace and progress.

The institutionalization of democracy is deep rooted in the social structure of Kuwait. Indeed, Kuwait's Parliamentary experience weaved its way through to the present form through gradual and steady development which characterized the growth of the Kuwaiti society and state system since its inception.

The Al-Sabah family, led by its patriarch, Sheikh Sabah 1, always adhered to consultation practice based on tribal traditions in his efforts to shape the destiny of Kuwait, as far back as 1752.

The Kuwaiti tradition encourages consultation and expression of ideas and opinions in Kuwaiti Diwanis among the different segments of the society, irrespective of their social status. What emerged as a consensus had an impact on the formulation of State Policy which reflected popular will. Thus, the Diwanis, numerous in number, served as a defacto consultative body in the earlier days.

Historically, elections in Kuwait go back to 1756 when the people of Kuwait unanimously elected Sheikh Sabah the First as the Head of State.

As Kuwait entered the 20th. century, the need of the time brought about further development of the democratic institutions. Kuwait has known consultation system as the basis of government since 1920 when the first State Consultative Council, comprising of 21 prominent citizens, was formed during the reign of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber. It was indeed a historical indicator of a serious attempt to create a democratic

atmosphere. This was followed by the Municipal Council comprising of 14 members of which 10 were elected by the people and the rest 4 were appointed. This Council made all types of decisions and recommendations.

In 1938, the first elected Legislative Assembly with 14 members was formed through general elections. This undoubtedly had a tremendous impact on the political life of the Kuwaitis. This was followed by the formation of the State Consultative Council.

After Kuwait gained absolute political independence on 19th. June 1961 through the termination of the January 1899 Friendship and Cooperation Treaty between Kuwait and Great Britain, new parliamentary life was initiated through the election of a Constituent Assembly that was entrusted with the task of framing the State's constitution.

Democratic experience in Kuwait became more mature, conscious and open with the election of the first Kuwaiti National Assembly in 1963.

The Parliamentary experience passed through a process of trial and error with each new experience strengthening the democratic spirit and institution.

An Amiri decree in December 1980 set up 25 constituencies, increasing the number from 10.

A constituent Council set up through an Amiri Decree in 1989 to recommend specific changes in the constitution to suit the need of the time, was in session when the country experienced a brutal aggression on August 1, 1990. Kuwaiti stint with parliamentary practice was a major target of this aggression. Parliamentary life was restored through General Elections held in October 1992 for the Seventh Legislative terms. Kuwait witnessed a democratic festival when Parliamentary elections were held in July 2003 to elect the National Assembly for the 10th. Legislative term. Over 130,000 voters

went to ballot centres in 25 constituencies across Kuwait to elect their representatives in Parliament.

Institutionalization of democracy in Kuwait was further consolidated when in 2006, in a landmark development, parliamentary elections based on adult suffrage included women electorates and candidates for the first time. In the last Parliamentary elections on December 2012, three women were elected Members of Parliament. One of them was inducted in the Cabinet as a Minister.

A Parliamentary Deputy must be at least 30 years of age on Election Day. Government servants have to relinquish their respective positions prior to their contesting the polls. The technocrat Ministers not elected in the National Assembly are considered members in it by dint of their position in the cabinet. However, they do not participate in committees' work and cannot vote when an interpolation leads to a no-confidence motion against one of the Cabinet Members.

Kuwait is divided into 25 electoral constituencies with each constituency electing 2 representatives in the Assembly.

The 50 seat unicameral Legislature is elected for a four year term. Currently, there are five geographically distributed electoral districts. Regular Annual Session is no less than eight months subject to budgetary sanction.

The Assembly sessions are only valid when more than half of its members are present. Decisions are taken by absolute majority of the members present.

Parliamentary representation is on a non-party basis since there are no active political parties in Kuwait. Elections in Kuwait meet a relatively high standard of fairness. The Government does not interfere or influence the voting mechanism.

His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait has the Power to dissolve the Assembly and in such an event, new elections are held within two months. ■

The rulers of Kuwait

THE House of Al Sabah is the ruling family of Kuwait.

A scion of the Al Anazi and Utub tribes in Najd, present day Saudi Arabia, migrated to Kuwait in the early 18th century.

The Sheikhs of these two tribes entered into an alliance in 1752 to rule Kuwait.

The first Emir of Kuwait was Sheikh Sabah 1. Subsequent Sheikhs are the descendants of Sabah 1.

The Emir of Kuwait who is the head of the executive branch is nominated by a family council composed of senior and prominent members of the Al-Sabah clan.

A unique feature of the succession formality is that it is not strictly hereditary. Traditionally, the family chooses

the leader from each succeeding generation. For instance, the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah who was the Emir from 1977 to 2006, had appointed his cousin Sheikh Saad Al-Salem Al-Sabah as the Crown Prince.

The Kuwaiti parliament has a say in the appointment of the Amir.

Article 4 of the constitution stipulates that Kuwait is a hereditary Emirate, the succession to which shall be in the descendants of the late Mubarak Al-Sabah. Mubarak Al-Sabah had three children, the offspring of two of them Jaber and Salem rotate the Emirship.

Article 3 of the constitution states that the parliament has a constitutional right to



H.H. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (Present Ruler/Amir of the State of Kuwait)

approve or disapprove the appointment of an Emir.

Legislative Power is vested in the Amir and the National Assembly in accordance with the constitution.

The Executive Power is vested in the Amir and cabinet in the manner specified by the constitution. The Amir exercises his powers through his ministers. ■

Names of the Rulers	Period of reign
Jaber Bin Mubarak Al-Sabah	1915-1917
Salem Bin Mubarak Al-Sabah	1917-1921
Ahmed Bin Jaber Al-Sabah	1921-1950
Abdullah Bin Salem Al-Sabah	1950-1965
Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah	1965-1977
Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah	1977-2006
Sa'ad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah	15-1-2006 to 24-1-2006
Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah	25-1-2006 -