In Sittwe, relief camps struggle to cope with new influx

By Soe Than Lynn with AFP

The Rakhine State government is unable to accept more Rohingya refugees seeking shelter in Sittwe, an official said last week, as aid workers warned of a deepening humanitarian crisis with critical shortages of food, water and medicine.

More than 100,000 people have been displaced since June in two major outbreaks of violence in Rakhine State, where renewed clashes last month between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims uprooted about 30,000 people.

Dozens were killed on both sides and thousands of homes were torched.

Rakhine State Attorney-General U Hla Thein said the Sittwe camps could only take care of those displaced during violence in June.

“The government is spending K100 million a day on relief camps and supplies will only last another three months. There are a large number of new refugees coming to Sittwe – approaching 7000 – and we cannot accept them. We are sending them to Maungdaw, which is three or four hours drive from Sittwe. We sent them to Maungdaw to balance refugee populations and manage them more conveniently,” he said at the office of the Rakhine State government on October 27.

However, the government on October 27 allowed about 50 boats carrying refugees to land in Sittwe, where they have been temporarily accepted, and U Hla Thein said number of people in Thaechaung camp, which houses displaced Muslims, has swelled as a result.

While the government has previously said there are 40,000 in the camp, the number is much higher if refugees in nearby areas, such as Thechaung, Bumay and Thetkaipyin villages, are included in the total.

“It is hard to collect data on them...
Hopes for peace in Myanmar

Recent ceasefires between the government and non-state armed groups represent the best prospect in decades to resolve ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. The people who stand to benefit most from peace are civilian communities, which have suffered from decades of fighting and associated human rights abuses. However, the voices of local communities are seldom heard over the political elites who argue among themselves.

By Ashley South

THE past year has been one of extraordinary changes in Myanmar. The government has implemented a series of reforms, including the release of most political prisoners and relaxations on censorship and freedom of association. Perhaps most significant has been the rapprochement between President U Thein Sein and reformist ministers, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Also hugely important has been a series of ceasefires agreed between the government and various non-state armed groups, some of which have been fighting for autonomy for more than half a century.

Of course, many problems remain, including the urgent need for economic reform. Furthermore, horrific recent violence in western Rakhine State indicates how badly things can go wrong if ethnic and political differences are not managed carefully. Nevertheless, the reform process represents the best opportunity in decades to resolve armed ethnic conflicts in which have plagued the country since independence.

Dozens of non-state armed groups – representing minorities that constitute more than 30 percent of the population – have been fighting for autonomy from the militarised state, and self-determination for their communities. Although some groups may not seek self-rule for private economic motivations, many of Myanmar’s armed ethnic groups do enjoy strong support from those they seek to represent. These war-ravaged minority communities express strong desires for peace – challenging government and ethnic minority elites to respond creatively.

The people want peace

On my travels through Myanmar over the past 20 years, I have made many excursions into the warzones. Particularly over the past year, I have been privileged to visit some highly remote and conflict-affected areas. I have been struck by the degree to which “ordinary” civilian populations support the peace process. Again and again, people have said how much they welcome the benefits of peace – although many still do not trust that the peace process is irreversible.

‘This window of opportunity will not last forever.’

People have told me that it is far easier to travel in conflict-affected areas. Previously villagers had to fear rough handling – or worse – on the part of Myanmar army personnel and/or insurgent forces. In contrast, recent months have seen travel restrictions greatly eased in many areas so that villagers can move more freely and spend more time tending their fields and getting products to market. While these benefits may not seem significant to political elites (or foreign analysts), they mean a great deal to local communities. As one person put it: “For the first time in living memory, we have not heard gunfire in the hills for many months – and no longer live in fear.” An elderly Karen lady told me that, for the first time in decades, she did not have to hide her food stocks in the forest, and her sons could sleep overnight in the rice fields, without fear of violence.

In order for those benefits to be sustained and consolidated, it is important that the government and non-state armed groups move on from the agreement of ceasefires to negotiate substantial political settlements. The president and his advisers have negotiated truces with 10 of the 11 most significant armed ethnic groups. However, fighting continues across much of north and northeast Myanmar – particularly in Kachin State. If the government is serious about the peace process, its first priority must be to end all fighting nationwide. At the same time, it urgently needs to move beyond ceasefires, to starting political talks with the leaders of ethnic communities.

Hopes and fears

The government seems willing to engage in political discussions, which would be an extremely important breakthrough. Many ethnic leaders regard these peace overtures as the best opportunity in decades to address the residual political and economic issues that have long structured armed conflicts. However, others feel threatened by the peace process for marginalisation in the new Myanmar as the government enhances its legitimacy. This has prompted some ethnic leaders to say that, in exile to criticise or even reject the peace process, accusing the government and international community of moving too quickly. In contrast, other opposition actors claim that the pace of change is too slow. Such criticisms relate to genuine concerns about the peace process. However, they also reflect fears among some exile opposition groups of losing control of the political agenda and donor funding. It is sad to see some overseas-based activist groups criticising those who are working with local organisations inside the country to help communities recover from decades of conflict.

The sceptics do have legitimate concerns regarding the peace process – in particular, the lack of substantial political talks so far and the fighting in Kachin areas. It would, however, be a grave mistake to allow such concerns to undermine the peace process. Over the past decade-plus, Myanmar has been something of a “boutique issue” in human rights circles – but otherwise largely ignored by the international community. The reform process has provoked renewed interest from major powers and this brings the chance to highlight ethnic issues. This window of opportunity will not last forever.

The international community has an important – but limited – role to play. Foreign aid can help communities recover from conflict, test the ceasefires and build trust and confidence in the peace process. The US, Australia and Europe seem committed to supporting the reforms in Myanmar, and international donors have committed tens of millions of dollars to support the peace process.

The stakes are high. If Myanmar can re-invent itself as a country with respect for basic rights and the rule of law, this will be a major achievement – a rare example of a “pariah state” coming in from the cold. In the process, Myanmar will likely move away from the Chinese sphere of influence, which is an important geostrategic objective for Western countries. In the context of such power politics, potential spoilers are unlikely to succeed in undermining the peace process. Instead, they should seize this opportunity to ensure the best outcome for minority citizens. In this way, activist groups and other political elites can support the communities they seek to represent, rather than undermining the prospects for sustainable peace in Myanmar.

(Ashley South is a writer and consultant specialising in ethnic issues in Myanmar and SouthEast Asia.)
The World Bank Group will continue to push forward with its [reform] efforts.

By Zaw Win Than and Aye Thidar Kyaw

AFTER a 20-year absence, the World Bank is back in Myanmar. The World Bank Group’s board of directors last week endorsed a new Interim Strategy for Myanmar and a US$80 million grant targeted at improving rural communities.

A further $5 million will go towards supporting conflict-hit communities, while the bank also plans to provide a further $165 million in low-interest loans once Myanmar clears its debts.

The strategy will build on the government’s work in Myanmar for the next 18 months, focusing on accelerating poverty reduction by helping reform institutions to deliver better services to people during this critical transition period.

“I am heartened by the reforms that have been taking place in Myanmar, and encourage the government to continue to push forward with their efforts,” said Jim Yong Kim, the president of the World Bank Group.

“We hope to move ahead as part of a united global community to deliver solutions to address people’s most urgent development needs, especially in areas such as health, education, and infrastructure, and we’ll also work to build up the private sector so jobs can be created.”

Under the Interim Strategy, the World Bank Group will help the government improve economic governance and create conditions for growth and jobs by providing policy advice and technical assistance in three main areas: public finance management, regulatory reform and private-sector development.

Analytical work, including a financial accountability assessment, a public expenditure review, and an investment climate assessment are under way to understand these efforts.

While institutional change is a long term effort, the Interim Strategy aims to build confidence in reforms by bringing visible benefits to local communities, and strengthening the role of civil society to engage with the government.

Our strategy has a strong focus on inclusive citizens of Myanmar such as jobs and economic opportunities,” said TFC vice president for Asia Pacific, Karn Finkelman.

“TFC is seeking to improve access finance to the country so that businesses can expand and hire people. We are also working together with the World Bank in assessing Myanmar’s investment climate and infrastructure needs, with an initial focus on helping to connect people and businesses through better telecoms and providing reliable power that will help firms to thrive.”

World Bank’s country manager for Myanmar, Mr Kanthan Shankar, told a press conference on November 2 that an analysis was being conducted to work out how best the anticipated $165 million in low-interest loans could be spent.

“We are going to do analysis and find out what is the priority for the government and the people. At this point, we are looking at infrastructure, but we have not decided anything,” Mr Shankar said.

He said human capacity and the bank’s unfamiliarity with Myanmar were the most significant challenges, and added that it planned to slowly scale up its programs.

“Putting the grant in place over five years will be important to generate concrete benefits for the development and reforms that create real opportunities for all the people of Myanmar,” said Pamela Cox, the bank’s vice president for East Asia and the Pacific.

Projects take time, but we are committed to working with all our partners to ensure that poor people start to feel the benefits of reforms quickly, especially through better services from the government.”

The Interim Strategy was prepared jointly with International Finance Corporation, the member of the World Bank Group focused on private-sector development in developing countries.

“Developing Myanmar’s private sector will be important to generate concrete benefits for the true that every solution will work in [Myanmar] so we need to ensure that we try [project], we pilot [them] and build on success,” he said.

In an earlier interview with The Myanmar Times, Mr Shankar said the $80 million in assistance would be earmarked for infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals and schools, and livelihood development projects in 15 rural townships – one in each state, region and union territory – while the extra $5 million will go to communities in conflict-hit areas.

Communities will be able to decide which projects they want funded, Mr Shankar said, adding that non-governmental organisations in Myanmar would also be involved in the process.

“The grant money doesn’t go to the government, but to the community. We will keep track of the funds to avoid corruption and ensure transparency,” he said.

Progress would be monitored through a financial report every four months, and the government would audit projects every year. The funds will be transferred in instalments to special accounts at the community level in small amounts, depending on the project size.

“The implementing agency would show us the bills, and future payments will be transferred after the invoices are checked. While the government has granted a waiver to allow international financial institutions to operate in Myanmar, the government will have to repay its outstanding debt, which stands at $803 million, according to the bank’s information centre.

The Interim Strategy for Myanmar is the most priority for the government.” said Mr Kanthan Shankar.

“We are going to do analysis and find out what is the priority for the government and the people. At this point, we are looking at infrastructure, but we have not decided anything.”

The commission must take action according to the law if it finds the accusation proved, and that the official is not suitable to remain in office. – Translated by Thiri Min Aye

Voters begin push to unseat MDY mayor

By Si Thi Lwin

U Aung Moung was former minister for finance and revenue for Mandalay Region and was appointed mayor seven months ago. Critics say he has directed police to use excessive force to resolve land disputes, such as the relocation of a vegetable market and eviction of families in Chamayathazi and Pyigyaung townships.

“The bid to remove Mandalay Mayor U Aung Moung through the constitutional recall procedure took another step forward this week, with residents saying they have amassed signatures of more than one percent of the electorate, as required under the constitution.

Activists in Mandalay have been collecting voters’ signatures to remove Mayor U Aung Moung from Mandalay Region Hluttaw seat of Mahamanyumg 1 because they are unhappy at his heavy-handed attempts to evict people living illegally on municipal land. It is believed to be the second time the procedure has been tried in Myanmar, with voters in Yangon’s South Okkalapa township unsuccessful in their attempt to recall Pyithu Hluttaw representative U Aung Thein Linn.

Mr Nyi Nyi Kyaw, a political activist and former member of All Burma Students’ Democratic Front, told The Myanmar Times he was ready to submit the signatures to the Union Election Commission this month.

“The signatures that we got now are from the voters who actually voted in the 2010 election... the number of voters who want to remove the mayor is now more than 1pc of voters who supported him in the past election. Now we will submit [the signatures] to the Union Election Commission in early November,” Ko Nyi Nyi Kyaw told The Myanmar Times.

While institutional change is the most priority for the government, but to the community. We will keep track of the funds to avoid corruption and ensure transparency,” he said.

The recall process requires the Union Election Commission, on receiving the necessary signatures, to investigate the complaints. The official concerned may rebut the accusations.

The commission must take action according to the law if it finds the accusation proved, and that the official is not suitable to remain in office. – Translated by Thiri Min Aye.
Govt agrees to political talks with KIO

By Seng Mai

The Kachin Independence Organisation has welcomed the government’s promise from President U Win Myint to pursue political talks.

The concession from the government, which has in the past proposed ceasefire talks before political negotiations, came during a meeting at Kyin Chang Hotel in Shweli, Chin State, on October 30.

U Win Myint, who is also a minister in the President’s Office, said the government would be willing to resolve the political problems in order to achieve peace.

"Peace talks cannot be resolved by means of war but war will be resolved politically," he told the KIO.

"Peace talks cannot be resolved by means of war but war will be resolved politically."

He said the KIO has coveted political negotiations since it rejected against the government in 1961.

While a ceasefire was signed in 1994, the military government deferred political talks, saying that it would be the responsibility of the civilian government established under the 2008 constitution.

Peace negotiators from the government and Kachin Independence Organisation in the Chinese town of Shweili.

For its part, the government team demanded the KIO’s armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army, to disarm and allow attacks against transport infrastructure, that conflict be scaled down, and that more individuals be allowed to pass through a KIO checkpoint to repair the Tapain Hydropower Project.

Because battles were being fought near KIA Brigade 4 while the meeting was underway, U Le Maung Gun, head of the delegation, said that the peace talks could not be resolved politically.

The group was linked by the KIO having coveted political negotiations since it rejected against the government in 1961.

So we must hold political discussions," said the President.

"Peace talks cannot be resolved by means of war but war will be resolved politically."
Poverty, conflict to blame for opium production rise: UN

By Win Ko Ko Latt

OPium cultivation in Myanmar is expected to increase in 2012 on year because of food shortages, poverty and armed conflict, a United Nations official said last week.

“Opium poppy growing increases when there is weakness in the country’s security, and law and order,” said Dr. John Bleho, regional representative of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said in Nay Pyi Taw on October 31.

UNODC country manager Mr. Jason Eligh said eradication alone is not an effective means of reducing opium poppy cultivation.

“...we must remember why farmers grow poppy. In most cases, it’s because they need cash to buy food to feed their families. Growing opium poppy provides much needed food security for many of them,” a UNODC statement quoting Mr Eligh as saying.

“In areas of conflict and instability like Shan and Kachin states with poor access to markets, there are few opportunities other than growing poppies. A sustainable long-term solution to poppy can only come through significant investments, and the rule of law and alternative development.”

According to the SouthEast Asia Opium Survey 2012, in 2011 the country had 40,600 hectares given over to opium growing and 20,000 opium farmers. The total production of raw opium was 61.0 tons, giving 14.4 kilograms a hectare for a total value of US$330 million.

Those numbers have grown in 2012 to 51,000 hectares of opium poppy and 200,000 cultivators, with a total production of 690 tonnes. The yield per hectare is slightly lower, at 13.5kg, but the value has risen to $420 million, said Mr Bleho.

Overall, opium cultivation in Southeast Asia has doubled over the past six years, UNODC says. (See adjoining report.)

In 2011, there were 99,000 hectares of opium fields in Shan State, representing 90 percent of all poppy cultivation in Myanmar. That proportion has fallen to 82pc in 2012, though the cultivation area has increased to 46,000 hectares.

The 2012 figures are estimated by combining the results of satellite and field surveys. Poppies grow mostly in the dry season, from September to December.

Of the 690 tonnes of opium produced, most is destined for the Chinese market, with the rest distributed throughout the world via other Asian countries. Local consumption makes up a relatively small amount, Mr Bleho said.

“We can say there are few local consumers in Myanmar because only 75,000 people are injecting drug users,” said Mr. Jason Eligh, UNODC country manager.

A worker in Shan State is shown to collect the opium poppy resin in Picture: AFP

A worker in Shan State is shown to collect the opium poppy resin. Pic: AFP

In May the government signed a deal to wipe out opium and other drug production in Shan State with a number of rebel groups currently engaged in ceasefire talks.

The move was part of a wider 15-year plan to eradicate opium by 2014, but the UN study, which used satellite, helicopter and ground surveys, suggests that timescale is slipping away.

In the 1980s, Myanmar was the world’s largest producer of opium, but it was replaced by Afghanistan in 1991.

The recent revival of opium cultivation in Myanmar has prompted concern at the UN, which says wage labourers are being drawn in to work alongside smallholder farmers who depend on the crop for a living. - AFP

Chinese users drive opiate trade

BANGKOK – Opium cultivation in Southeast Asia has more than doubled in the past six years as growing demand for heroin in China and the rest of Asia draws farmers to grow poppies, the UN said last week.

Opiate users in East Asia and the Pacific now account for about a quarter of the world total, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said in a report on October 31.

China alone has more than one million registered heroin users, and consumes most of the drug in the region, it said, adding adding farmers in Laos and Myanmar are pushing into increasingly remote land to avoid their crops being destroyed by authorities.

The findings cast doubt over the notion of opium eradication programs that were successful in driving down cultivation in both countries in the decade until 2000.

With prices rising, cultivation in Laos soared 56 percent to 6,000 hectares (14,000 acres) in 2012, and by 7pc to 51,000 hectares in Myanmar, the world’s second largest producer after Afghanistan, according to UN estimates.

“Overall, opium poppy cultivation in the region has thus doubled since 2006,” the UN said in a report from Laos, Myanmar and Thailand that nearly 25,000 hectares of poppies were eradicated in 2012, the report said.

The study estimates opium produced by Laos and Myanmar to be worth $1.8 billion in 2012, a third more than the previous year. Farmgate prices reached $1800 a kilogram in Laos amid scarce supply, and $520 in Myanmar.

The number of people engaged in cultivation has risen in parallel with up to 38,000 “opium growing households” in communist Laos and 300,000 in Myanmar.

The rise indicates Myanmar farmers – mainly in northeastern Shan State – will only turn away from opium cultivation if alternative livelihoods are available, the report said.

“Farmers are very vulnerable to losses in income derived from opium, especially those who depend on such an income source for food security,” it said.

“Furthermore, opium cultivation is generally linked to the absence of peace and security, which indicates the need for both political and economic solutions,” it added.

The drugs trade is closely linked to Myanmar’s long-running insurgencies in remote border areas, with ethnic minority rebels widely thought to use drug profits to fund operations.

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In the 1980s, Myanmar was the world’s largest producer of opium, but it was replaced by Afghanistan in 1991.

The recent revival of opium cultivation in Myanmar has prompted concern at the UN, which says wage labourers are being drawn in to work alongside smallholder farmers who depend on the crop for a living. - AFP

By Thiri Min Htan

The report added.

Conflict zones have also become larger opium-producing areas because of the breakdown of the rule of law. “Pappy cultivation in Kachin State was limited in the past, but is now increasing. That shows the lack of security,” he said.

The anti-drug taskforce destroyed more than 7000 tonnes of opium poppy fields in 2010-11, and more than 25,700 hectares in 2011-12, said Maj Gen Kyaw Kyaw Tun. – Translated by Thiri Min Htan
Former NLD members in Pathein form social organisation

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

FORMER members of the National League for Democracy from Pathein township in Ayeyarwady Region have formed a social organisation, Democracy Network, after resigning from the party over the organisation of the party’s national assembly.

The network was formed on October 27 with a ceremony to formally take down the party flag from its former Pathein head office, from where the network will now operate.

About 130 members resigned in late October after serving the party for more than two decades. The 132 members formed the social organisation to help carry out health, education and other social activities in Pathein, said U Nyunt Hlaing, one of the founders of Democracy Network.

“We don’t want to form a new political party because we love the NLD but we can no longer work with them. So we have organised this social network here,” he said.

Up to 500 NLD members had been expected to resign in the township but U Nyunt Hlaing said many were still hesitant to leave, despite their unhappiness over the national assembly.

The members resigned because of conflict with the party’s head office over the decision to select new, rather than long-serving, members to lead the township and sub-township assemblies.

“I heard that some people are still unsure whether they should resign. Anyway, we have organised this social organisation and we will continue our work through it,” he said.

Democracy Network will assist with students’ education, open libraries, provide support to farmers and help with healthcare issues in Pathein township.

Some of the members are teachers and doctors, U Nyunt Hlaing said.

“We will use the former NLD office as our Democracy Network office. We took down the NLD flag on October 27. Many NLD members in Myanmar and Labutta visited on that day,” U Nyunt Hlaing said.

Democracy Network will hold its first meeting this week to elect central executive members, plan activities and raise funds.

“The NLD head office has still not responded to us about this issue,” he said.

Par Par Lay begins ‘no fear’ campaign

By Phyo Wai Kyaw

ATTENDANCES at National League for Democracy office openings in Mandalay and Sagaing regions have been swollen by the regular appearance of renowned comedian Par Par Lay.

In his speeches at the office openings, Par Par Lay has urged attendees to abandon their fear of politics, a message he said is targeted at those who are considering joining the party for the first time.

Par Par Lay launched what he calls his “no fear” campaign in June and has attended office openings in Myingyan, Ngaran, Taungtha, Myotha, Ayarwady and Shwebo in Sagaing region and some towns in Mandalay region.

“I already went to about 40 offices for this campaign. I don’t criticise or point out any weak points about our opponents, I just tell people how they can move within the framework of the law. Sometimes I make political jokes and sing songs … I also tell people about courage, giving the example of how I would go and perform, even though I knew I could be arrested after the performance,” said Par Par Lay.

One-third of the well-known Moustache Brothers troupe, Par Par Lay has been imprisoned three times, the first occasion after performing at Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s house on Independence Day in 1996. He said Daw Aung San Suu Kyi told him in 1988 that famous artists had more influence among voters than politicians and he hopes to exercise this influence for the party until the 2015 election.

“We need to try to get more people [to vote] for the NLD in the 2015 election and I am working for this goal. I decided on the ‘no fear’ theme because I found that some were afraid to vote for the NLD even in the by-elections and I still see some of them [are afraid]. So I talked to them about courage and democracy by comparing with my life, the difficulties I faced in the past, and letting them know what human rights are,” he said, adding that he thought about one-third of people in the areas he visited were afraid of involvement in politics.

“I just targeted prospective members at the campaigns, not those already in the party. Some people are afraid to take a pamphlet or wear red-coloured clothing … I also went around some working class wards before the by-elections … it seems like we were successful because we got more votes than our rivals in those places.”

NLD member U Ko Ko Aung from Mandalay’s Pyigyitagon township said that the support of respected artists like Par Par Lay gave the NLD a significant boost.

“Par Par Lay in Mandalay and Sagaing in Yangon are famous comedians who sacrificed their lives for politics and the people love them. More people come to the opening of NLD ward offices if Par Par Lay is there so we have a better opportunity to give them a political message at the time,” U Ko Ko Aung said.

“However some senior NLD officials in Mandalay Region don’t like Par Par Lay because they think Par Par Lay used to get more cheers than them. We be convenient for travellers who want to do a round trip of the countries. – Ya Yu Maw

MAI gets new aircraft

NATI0NAL carrier Myanmar Airways International received a new aircraft, an A320-200, on October 28. The 280-seat plane is the airline’s seventh and will be used to expand existing routes and add new destinations.

MAI will begin flights between Yangon and Hong Kong by the end of this year and launched a service from Mandalay to Gaya on November 1. The airline is also planning to offer more routes out of Mandalay, including Bangkok, Singapore and Phuket.

MAI also began a Yangon-Bangkok-Singapore-Bangkok service on October 28, which it says will be convenient for travellers who want to do a round trip of the countries. – Ya Yu Maw
Don't resign over assembly issues, NLD members urge

By Phyo Wai Kyaw

NATIONAL League for Democracy members from Mandalay who have been outspoken in their criticism of the handling of preparations for the party’s national assembly have urged fellow members not to resign over the issue.

The Myanmar Times reported last week that up to 500 NLD members from Ayeayarwaddy Region’s Pathein township are expected to resign over the selection of delegates for the party’s upcoming national assembly. Members from Mandalay’s Pyigyitagun township said they also faced conflict with “undemocratic” elements in the party; that has “undemocratic, dictatorial” elements in the party.

“… we need to fight and drive the undemocratic” elements in the party rather than quit. “We want to urge the members in the country not to resign … we need to fight and drive out undemocratic, dictatorial members in the party,” said member U Myint Ko. “I want to urge members, especially U Myint Soe and Dr Than Htike from Pathein, to follow the example of our leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. She didn’t leave from Myanmar politics even when the NLD was suppressed for many years and we can see the result now,” he said.

NLD members in Pyigyitagun said conflicts over the assembly are yet to be resolved, with a regional official having to step in to stop a dispute in the township on October 28.

“There was an argument that nearly turned into a brawl on October 28 at the NLD township office. Undemocratic members formed a ward assembly commission with just their people and did not include those who were suggested by members in the wards. We don’t like it and so we went to the meeting that day but they didn’t let us enter the meeting. I think they don’t know well about democracy and human rights. Some officials from the division commission arrived and promised to solve the problem so we left,” said member Ko Kyaw Kyaw Naing from the township’s Zagwe ward.

Another member, U Win Hlaing, said the township commission had been stacked with members from one ward. “There are 16 wards in Pyigyitagun township and the NLD has opened offices in 14 wards. However, when the township commission was formed, eight of the 15 members were from a single ward. Zaminyaw … members from other wards didn’t get a chance to be involved,” he said.

“Some members from the township commission tried to stop activities to sign up new members. They don’t give member cards in Pyigyitagun township. I think that they are dishonest and using undemocratic ways to organise the assembly,” said member U Myint Ko.

Neighbours urged to let in refugees

KUALA LUMPUR – Myanmar’s neighbours should prepare to accept refugees from the country’s Rohingya minority who may try to flee abroad to escape bloody communal violence, refugee organisations said last week.

Clashes in Rakhine State have left at least 180 dead since violence broke out in June, swamped refugee camps and forced tens of thousands of people to flee the bloodshed. The violence has sparked warnings of a potential surge in refugees opting for dangerous sea voyages.

“We are appealing to countries to keep borders open and to ensure safe access and whatever assistance they can provide,” said Vivian Tan, Asia-Pacific spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

“The main thing is that they have a safe place to land,” she said.

“Tan said Myanmar’s neighbours also should ensure that the UNHCR is granted access to any Rohingya who have legitimate claims to refugee status. Bangladesh police say about 130 people are missing after a boat sank Sunday while carrying Rohingya refugees heading for Malaysia. Human Rights Watch warned this week of a potential dramatic increase in the number of Rohingya taking to the seas this year in the wake of recent unrest.

Pic: Supplied

A region-level NLD member mediates a dispute between party members at a meeting in Pyigyitagun township on October 28.

Union Election Commission warns NDF over village for poor

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

THE National Democratic Force has received a warning from the Union Election Commission over a proposed plan to build a town for low-income families in Yangon Region’s Htantapin township, chairman U Khin Maung Swe said.

The head of the party’s Hlaing Tharyar branch, U Myint Thein, announced the plan to the media last month and said it would help achieve the party’s goal of improving living standards. While it has not been formally adopted by the party headquarters, U Khin Maung Swe said in an earlier interview with The Myanmar Times that it would be discussed and possibly adopted.

U Khin Maung Swe said the election commission had warned the plan infringed the authority of the township administration office.

“We know what U Myint Thein is planning … so we already talked to him and encouraged him to work together with the township administration,” U Khin Maung Swe said.

“No political parties can go over the top of government administration,” he said. “His project still hasn’t started yet because he is in hospital. … It is a good project but we have to negotiate with the township authorities, we, as a political party, cannot do it on our own.”

– AFP
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Western Union

moving money for better
MES seeks feedback for building code draft

By Aye Sapay Phyu

MYANMAR Engineering Society is inviting suggested changes to the first draft of a new national building code and expects to finalise the draft in December, general secretary U Ko Ko Gyi said last week.

He said the first draft of the code was distributed to government departments, United Nations agencies, non-government organisations, experts and other stakeholders in September.

“According to the suggestion from the users, we will revise the draft in December and hope it will come into effect soon after,” he said.

He said that everybody is welcome to request a copy of the draft from the Myanmar Engineer Society. U Ko Ko Gyi said that while the project to draft the building code was organised by Ministry of Construction, United Nations Human Settlements Program and MES, representatives from all relevant government departments as well as private sector experts and engineers had participated in developing the document.

He said a building code is important for disaster preparedness and implementing the code will improve risk reduction activities, especially against strong winds and earthquakes.

“Lots of properties that didn’t use proper construction techniques were damaged during [Cyclone] Nargis. If we obey the code in the construction of buildings such as schools, hospital and houses, the community will be safer if and when disasters strike,” he said.

Yamethin miners protest in Yangon

By Naw Say Phaw Waa

ABOUT 35 people from the restive Moehti Moemi gold mining region of Yamethin township protested in front of the Myanmar National Prosperity Public company office in Yangon last week, one of the protesters said.

The group demonstrated outside the University Avenue office from 9am to midday on October 29, said Ko Youte Kyi, over the company’s conduct since taking over a lease in the mining area.

“We demanded compensation and to work freely like we were able to before. However, nobody from the company came out to meet us or say anything about it. After we protested, we went back to Yamethin at 5pm the same evening,” Ko Youte Kyi said.

He said the protest was held in Yangon because the group had twice been refused permission to hold it in Yamethin, in southern Mandalay Region.

They received permission from Kamaryut Township Police Station on October 29, said Daw Myint Myint Khine, who also took part in the protest.

She said organisers estimated about 1,000 workers from Moehti Moemi would come to Yangon for the protest but because of financial difficulties only a few could make it. “The reason we came here is because the company has not negotiated in good faith. They negotiated with Mandalay Region [Minister for Forestry and Mining] U Than Soe Myint because the company has not made the company then relented and agreed to allow small operators to continue mining at Moehti Moemi for another year, Democratic Voice of Burma reported on June 15.

The Chiang Mai-based news organisation reported that Myanmar National Prosperity had made the promise to small mining companies and individual miners in December 2011, saying they could excavate gold from the area for the duration of its five-year contract with the government.

When the protesting workers failed to reach an agreement with the company, they started marching on Nay Pyi Taw. The company then relented and agreed to allow small operators to continue mining at Moehti Moemi for another year, Democratic Voice of Burma reported on June 15.

However, the simmering unrest has continued, with a number of miners charged with committing an obscene act and criminal intimidation in September.

Miners from the Moehti Moemi region of Yamethin township protest in Yangon on October 29. Pic: Boothee
Party formed in Mandalay to represent Muslims

By Khin Su Wai

A GROUP of Myanmar Muslims have been given permission to form a political party, but only after agreeing to remove the word “Pathi” from its name.

The United National Congress Party was approved by the Union Election Commission on October 15, said party official U Maung Maung Soe.

He said he originally applied to form the party simultaneously under the name United National Congress, but the group was unhappy at being unable to use the word “Pathi” in its name, saying that the term – and the Myanmar Muslim community – had been recognised by King Bodawpaya.

“They said that Pathi races are not among the official ethnic groups but King Bodawpaya recognized [the Pathi] and King Mindon donated not only recognised them but donated land in Mandalay for mosques. This list of official ethnic groups is a problem and we want it to be discussed in the parliament,” he said.

He said United National Congress Party is the only party in Myanmar that represents Myanmar Muslims and its ambition is to establish peaceful relations among the country’s various ethnic groups.

“We plan to form relationships with other political parties in Mandalay. If we get permission, we will also try to establish an organisation for Myanmar Muslims in upper Myanmar,” U Maung Maung Soe said.

TRAFFIC congestion in Mandalay has increased significantly because of a relaxation of import restrictions on cars and programmes to license illegal motorbikes, roads users have told The Myanmar Times.

“Under the former government, there were limitations on importing luxury cars but when the new government took power, luxury cars were able to be imported. I think the government should initially import vehicles for public transport instead,” said Ko Kyaw Pho No Aung, a resident of central Chanayetharsan township.

“The government also failed to do any upgrading work to ensure the roads can handle the likely increase in vehicles before they give permission to import cars and register motorbikes. That’s why roads are blocked during rush hour. To avoid the traffic we have to leave for work earlier,” he said.

The increase in vehicles has also made driving more dangerous, with a significant increase in accidents and road fatalities this year.

“I have to drive carefully when I take my children from their school, which is in the downtown area, during peak hour previously took 30 minutes, it now takes up to one hour,” he said.

Mandalay City Development Committee’s Department of Engineering (Roads and Bridges) says passenger buses are responsible for most traffic jams because they wait too long for passengers at bus stops and sometimes collect passengers near intersections.

Other factors are street vendors who open shops on the road and illegally parked cars, motorcycles and bicycles.

“Residents maintain it is the number of vehicles that is to blame. The main roads of the city are significantly blocked by more new cars and new motorbikes. Sometimes it takes about 10 to 15 minutes just to move one block,” said Ko Nyan Win from Mahaungmyay township.

Another issue is the lack of side streets at the east and west sides of the city, poor adherence to traffic rules and a lack of parking in new commercial buildings, said U Zin Min Swe from CAD Construction.

“There is still no traffic control plan so I think the government should start to resolve these problems by drawing a traffic control plan immediately. If not and things continue the way they are now, within two years the fastest commuters will be those walking,” U Zin Min Swe said.

As of August, there were 38,544 cars, 1,356 buses, 420,768 motorcycles, 9,825 three-wheeled vehicles and 5729 trawlergyi (farm vehicles) registered in Mandalay.

Translated by Zar Zar Soe
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Minorities fight to save mother tongue

By Kelly Macnamara

November 5 - 11, 2012

The Shan book have been used in area state schools as part of language teaching in minority areas. Yet there remains an indifference to more nuanced questions of cultural identity among officials, observers say teaching all languages – particularly Chinese and Falam but the language has disappeared too,” said Sai Kham Sint, a Shan activist who turned to politics after decades of civil war, calls reconciliation efforts. “If they also want to learn their ethnic language, they can if they have free time.”

Language software launched for Chin dialect

By Nuam Bawi

WANT to learn a Chin language? A software program to teach the basics of the Zomi dialect of the language has just been launched.

A program called Zolaisinna – which means learning the Zomi, or Chin, language – was launched in early October. “My ethnic group is small, and I don’t want its literature to be lost. This is one way I can help the development of my people,” said Tg Chin Suan Kap, who developed the software. “Although I was brought up in Tenang township, Chin State, and learned the Chin language to elementary level at school, I’m not very good at the language. These days children have even fewer opportunities to learn our literature so I invented this software so they can learn the language themselves.”

This is a chance to learn the Chin language without a teacher. Parents don’t have time to teach their children their own language, so children only know what they have learned at school. But using this software, if they don’t understand the first time, “They can help them again,” he said. “This software is in the Zomi (Tiddim) dialect of the Chin language. Zomi is one of three Chin dialects, along with Falam and Falum but the language has declined a lot.”

All Chin dialects use the Roman alphabet in a system developed by American missionaries in 1899. Those interested in learning more can call 09-5006-1315.

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Too soon for refugee return: Shan groups

Region still unstable despite signing of ceasefires between government and several non-state armed groups

**IN DEPTH**

NATIONAL and regional governments have begun talks over the creation of a village in Shan State for people displaced by conflict but sources in the region say they are concerned it may be too soon to resettle refugees.

A report in the Shan Herald Agency for News said the proposed village would be in the Hinam-Tawng Hio area of Tanpyin and Monghasa townships and would house about 350 families.

The government reached an initial ceasefire with the Shan State Army-South in November 2011 and the Shan State Army-North two months later but activists and residents say parts of Shan State still suffer from instability and conflict.

“Most refugees want to go home,” said Sai Khur Hneng, a spokesperson for the Shan Human Rights Foundation in Thailand. “But now they also think about their livelihoods, and their health and their children and how much they can trust the government that you have been fighting for 50 years.’’

Though fighting has subsided near larger towns such as Lashio, Sai Khur Hneng told The Myanmar Times that outbreaks of violence between Shan rebel groups and the Tatmadaw are still common in rural areas. In his estimation, there have been over 100 armed encounters in rural Shan State since September 2011, shortly before the ceasefires were agreed.

“We cannot say the exact number, but since the ceasefire hundreds of people have fled to Thailand and from the fighting... it may be thousands,” he said.

U Khun Htun Os, a prominent Shan politician and former political prisoner, said it was “a problem of chain of command”.

“The military says they are under the control of the commander and chief, not the government,” said the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy leader. “They must change their attitude.”

The Shan soldiers are equally hesitant to lay down their arms, he said.

“Successful governments have not kept their promises: it’s hard to trust a government that you have been fighting for 50 years.”

In addition to fighting the Tatmadaw, the Shan State Army-North has also clashed repeatedly with other armed groups, they have a strong army and lots of money. Neither side is thinking about the peace, said the NGO leader, who requested not to be named.

For many activists in the region, Shan State’s economic situation poses an even bigger problem than the fighting.

The NGO leader reported that outbreaks of violence between Shan rebel groups and Tatmadaw, the Shan State Army-South in November 2011 and the Shan State Army-North has also clashed repeatedly.

So many groups want to maintain their area... the Wa doesn’t want any other armed groups, they have a strong army and lots of money. Neither side is thinking about the peace, said the NGO leader, who requested not to be named.

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Soldiers and villagers walk home after destroying poppy fields near the village of Ho Hwayt, Shan State, on January 26. Pic: Reuters/Damir Sagolj

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Japanese NGO to provide $5m for mobile healthcare

By Shwe Yee Saw Myint

A JAPANESE non-government organisation will provide US$ 5 million over five years for a Myanmar Medical Association-run mobile medical clinic project, an MMA official said last week.

Deputy project manager Dr Hnin Wai Lwin Myo said the mobile medical service project had been approved by the government and will be implemented in selected townships in Mon and Kayin states this month with funding from the Nippon Foundation.

The townships include Hpa-an, Hlaingbwe and Kawkareik in Kayin State and Kyaikto and Thanbyuzayat in Mon State.

“Right now in these areas the leading cause of morbidity is non-communicable diseases, landmines and road traffic accidents. We also plan to extend this project into areas of Shan State,” Dr Hnin Wai Lwin Myo said.

Central offices will be opened in each of the townships, as well as basic offices and mobile clinics, Dr Hnin Wai Lwin Myo said.

A project team was established on September 1, a spokesperson for Nippon Foundation said, adding that it hoped to expand the project to Shan State and then other areas of the country but this “will depend on the result of evaluation report of these first operations”.

MMA president Dr Kyaw Myint Naing said at a launch ceremony in Yangon on October 24 the project would see the association undertake a variety of development tasks linked to health.

“We aim to provide mobile health clinics, emergency ambulance services and, if possible, improve water sanitation and personal hygiene and conduct health activities in schools, such as medical checkups and educational talks,” he said.

MMA is the only professional body of medical doctors in Myanmar and was established in 1949. It conducts projects in collaboration with UN agencies, focusing mostly on malaria, tuberculosis, reproductive health and youth development.

Renewed call for release of all prisoners of conscience

MORE than 500 former political prisoners met to demand the release of the remaining prisoners of conscience and pay respects to their elders last week.

Prominent elder former prisoners included U Win Tin, U Tin Oo, U Thu Wai, U Nyunt Thein, Thakhin Chan Htun and U Soe Maung. The ceremony was held on October 30, the full moon of Thadingyut, when it is the tradition to pay respect to seniors and other respected people.

Wearing prison garb and chains, the president of the Federation of Student Unions (Organising Committee) Ko Di Nyine Lin and others portrayed oppressive conditions in jail. “We performed to show up the system, and to demand humane treatment for political prisoners. We also wanted to call on the authorities to release the remaining political prisoners as soon as possible,” said Di Nyine Lin.

The event, in which other organisations also participated, took place at Royal Rose restaurant in Bahan township.

A number of relatives of political prisoners joined the event to call for the release of those still held. Family members of actor U Khine Tin called for the release of their relative, Ko Thein Htun, who they say is serving an unjustly imposed life sentence.

“He has been in jail more than 15 years now. I want him to be released quickly. Though I was happy when the political prisoners were released, I’m disappointed that my brother hasn’t been released yet,” he said. – Naw Say Phaw Waa
In 1994. On receiving a...
In Mandalay, breaking down artistic barriers

By Thomas Kean and Phyo Wai Kyaw

CONTEMPORARY art has not always been encouraged or appreciated in Myanmar, particularly by the powers that be.

Suu Myint Thein knows this all too well. While teaching at the State School of Fine Arts in Mandalay, he created a 21-foot-high statue of a woman holding her mouth in her hands in front of her stomach. He put it on display at the school but quickly learned to cover it up whenever his superiors visited.

The artist was asked me the same three questions: Why is the woman so tall? Why does she have no head? Why is the woman so tall?

“I always try and be a bit different,” Suu Myint Thein said, before adding: “I don’t want my work to be simple and straightforward.”

His desire to do “crazy, creative things” has also caused some conflict with Mandalay City Development Commission, he said, because a number of times he has been forced to sign a pledge to obey municipal laws after buildings and sculptures encroached on the street.

Recently, Suu Myint Thein was also briefly detained for a street performance that saw him wrap his body in blue tape and walk the streets handing out paddy and writing the letter “p” on the palms of bystanders.

“It might be hard to do, but it was really difficult to move wrapped in the tape and it was also hard being people poured water on me to cool me down. And then I nearly fell down near the most but I was determined to keep going,” he said.

He said the demonstration also highlighted the archaic legal framework in which art is regulated; the 1964 Library, Museum and Exhibition Monitoring Act contains nothing on performance art.

“I asked the police how I should have sought permission to do the performance, and they told me they didn’t know.”

But the Mandalay Contemporary Art Centre, on the corner of 69th and 28th streets, is more than a vehicle for Suu Myint Thein’s output. Its focus is as a venue for training young artists in sculpture, painting, and music, and holding monthly exhibitions and performances.

“There are so many art galleries in Mandalay but none of them teach students like this,” Suu Myint Thein said, as the sound of a student practising the violin alone in a room lined with keyboards and a rack of guitars drifted through the two-storey centre.

In the next room, at the rear of the ground floor, a monk worked on a sculpture while next door, a student, seated at a bank of computers, browsed the internet.

The centre has about 30 regular students, drawn from five years of age to university level, and this number rises to 200 for its summer classes. It charges K20,000 a month but students from most but low backgrounds pay less or in some cases nothing.

Ma Soe Soe Lwin, 18, said she started attending the school because she was “impressed” by Suu Myint Thein. She said the course fees are “reasonable” and she likes the flexible timetable.

“My hobby is painting and I finished the basic six-month course on sketching after graduating from high school,” she said. “I intend to try all types of traditional painting and continue on to modern painting, like contemporary arts.”

The works the students create are also entered in international competitions. This is hardly new but Suu Myint Thein also brings paintings by children from other countries to Myanmar to show his students.

Conscious of the fact most formal and informal art education in Myanmar is confined to Yangon and Mandalay, he is planning a roadshow of art by Japanese children that he will take to Lashio, Kyaukme and Hasapin in Shan State.

Another plan is for monthly events: Former prisoner of conscience Hein Linn hosted one of the first exhibitions at the centre in August, while a Polish non-government organisation recently held a five-day media training workshop on its upper floors.

“We also have a special focus on democracy and human rights and how they relate to art,” he said.

Despite recent changes to censorship of the press, Suu Myint Thein said art in Myanmar is still “restricted” by a 1964 law that requires all exhibitions to be inspected by censorship officials. He laments what he perceives as most artists’ indifference to the 1964 law.

“The reason [censorship] is not changing [for art exhibitions] is because not many people are pushing the boundaries,” he said. “Most people are only interested in creating their art, not fighting for more freedom.”

While insisting that censorship has no place in any society, let alone a democracy, he said the government inspections of artwork are even more chafing for contemporary artists.

“The people who inspect the paintings don’t understand anything about art,” he said. “But when it’s a realist painting, they can see pretty quickly what it’s about. Contemporary art is often more abstract – and that’s when you get real problems with the censorship officials.”

Immunisation program to target more than 70,000 children

By Yaman Phu Thit

HEALTH officials are preparing to launch a six-month program that aims to immunise 70,000 children in remote communities throughout almost 180 townships.

Dr Soe Lwin Nyein, director of epidemiology at the central branch of the Department of Health’s Expanded Program on Immunisation, told The Myanmar Times that the six-month program will begin in November.

The program is targeted at children under one year of age in low-coverages areas, said Dr Soe Lwin Nyein, who added: “The aim is to ensure that no child is left behind.”

UNICEF statistics show that while immunisation coverage in Myanmar meets the global standard of 92 percent, in some areas it is below 80pc. These include areas with large migrant populations, isolated communities and conflict zones.

“We plan to immunise the children in all these areas,” Dr Kyaw Kan Kaung, project manager and assistant director of the program, said on October 22.

Routine immunisation includes a routine of potentially life-threatening childhood diseases, such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, hepatitis B and measles.

In addition, the program will target children under the age of one who have missed routine immunisation, said Dr Soe Lwin Nyein.

Funding is provided by World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the Global Alliance on Vaccine and Immunisation (GAVI), with the cost estimated at US$3000-3500 for each township.

More than 6.4 million children were vaccinated against measles in March and a second dose will be provided towards the end of this year.

“Through this program of intensification, we will reach more than 70,000 children under the age of one who have missed routine immunisation,” said Dr Soe Lwin Nyein.

The survey estimated infant mortality was 37.5 deaths for every 1000 live births, and the under-five mortality rate is 46.1 for 1000 live births, a decline compared to the previous five-year period.
**No new CNG conversions: MOGE**

Only owners of CNG cars substituted under government program can convert imported vehicles to CNG

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

The government will not allow new vehicles to be converted to compressed natural gas unless they have been imported to replace a car that was previously used, according to a policy announced last week.

The spokesperson said that the ban on new CNG conversions was put in place so MOGE could focus on supplying natural gas to industrial zones.

He said that owners of CNG cars handed in to the government under an overage car substitution program have the option of converting their CNG cars importing a petrol or diesel vehicle and converting it over when it arrives in Myanmar.

CNG car owners can choose to keep their vehicles only when they import a new car after their old car to the CNG Department office.

However, they have to show the original owner’s receipt when they import a new car after their old car to the CNG Department office.

A worker at a CNG filling station. Pic: The Myanmar Times archive

The spokesperson said about 5000 CNG cars have been handed over to the government. The owners of about 9000 have already applied to change their newly imported cars to CNG and by the start of November about 1300 have received approval.

He said there are about 27,000 CNG vehicles and 40 CNG filling stations.

**Vacancy Announcement**

Vacancy Announcement

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FIVE hotels at Ngwe Saung, including some that closed in 2006, are planning to reopen in time for the 2013 SEA Games, U Hla Moe, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism for the Ayeyarwady region, told The Myanmar Times last week.

The hotels that closed in 2006 include Shwe Kayu and Shwe Thazin, while Hotel ACE shut down in 2011.

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The hotels that closed in 2006 include Shwe Kayu and Shwe Thazin, while Hotel ACE shut down in 2011.

“We are preparing for the SEA Games by expanding the number of rooms, not only for competitors but also for visitors,” he said.

There are more than 700 rooms at Ngwe Saung but when the five hotels reopen there will be 840 in 21 properties.

“The hotel zone will have more than 640 rooms if all 21 hotels can be opened in 2013. So we estimate we will accommodate on average more than 1700 visitors a day,” said U Hla Moe.

More than 37,000 overseas visitors, from Myanmar and abroad, visited Ngwe Saung during the 2011-12 high season – October 1 to April 30 – and hoteliers say they expect a higher number this season. – Translated by Zar Zar Soe

Government to co-finance $15m immunisation program with GAVI

By Yamon Phu Thin

NEARLY one-and-a-half million infants are to be protected against childhood diseases by a national vaccination program financed jointly by the government and an international immunisation organisation.

The program, to be launched in November, will target 1.4 million children under the age of one year, an official from the Ministry of Health told The Myanmar Times last month.

The government will contribute US$5.3 million for the five-year program, with $10 million being provided by the Global Alliance on Vaccination and Immunisation (GAVI) between 2012 and 2016.

“This is the first program with government co-financing to vaccinate children against preventable diseases,” said Dr Soe Lwin Nyin, director of epidemiology at the central branch of the Department of Health’s Expanded Program on Immunisation.

The vaccine, pentavaltent, will be used for the first time in Myanmar and is a combination of five vaccines to protect against diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, hepatitis B and haemophilus influenza type B (the bacteria that causes meningitis and pneumonia). It will replace DTP, which protects against diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus.

According to World Health Organisation statistics in 2009, about 2200 out of 100,000 children under the age of five in Myanmar are infected with meningitis and severe pneumonia.

Pentavalent costs $17.5 for one vial and $1.75 for one dose, said Dr Htar Htar Lin, assistant director of the Expanded Program on Immunisation. "The vaccines are bought from India and have been approved by Food and Drug Administration. It is 80 to 95 percent effective," she said.

Children receive four doses and the ministry, which has trained health staff to administer the vaccine, is urging parents not to miss the vaccination.

We want all children under the age of one to be vaccinated," Dr Soe Lwin Nyin said.

"It will help fulfil one of the Millennium Development Goals, which calls for the reduction in under-five mortality by two thirds by 2015."
A BRONZE bell believed to be more than 200 years old has been recovered near the southern entrance to Mahanandar Muni Pagoda in Mandalay’s Chamaytharbi township.

The bronze bell is three feet high, two feet wide at its mouth and three inches thick, and features images of two lions and carved inscriptions. It was found on October 25 while workers were preparing soil to plant trees, said Ko Sichu, one of the workers.

We found the bell in an upside down position when we dug about two feet down and we lifted it up rather than do it themselves.

“Now they only have to only renew their passport every two-and-a-half years, because most countries require at least six months validity on a passport to issue a visa and this makes it difficult for people living abroad.

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**Govt plans log export ban, targets value-added growth**

Bann on all exports of raw teak and hardwoods to come into force from 2014

**Conflict prompts autonomy call**

By Tim McLaughlin

A RAKHINE political group has issued a renewed call for greater autonomy in the region following recent communal unrest.

The central executive committee of the Arakan National Council (ANC) released a statement on October 27 criticising the Myanmar government for actions that it said led to deaths of Rohingya citizens. The party stated that the violence highlights the need for greater regional control over affairs in the state.

According to the statement, it is clear that Rakhine desperately needs state self-determination and autonomy because of Myanmar (of Myanmar) is unable to establish Rakhine’s security, stability and development,

Rakhine State between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Muslim Rohingyas minority that has seen at least 89 people killed.

“Moreover, we condemn the actions that lessen the social value of Rakhine, the army’s actions that led to deaths and injuries to locals when they fell to the crosses of the army,” the statement said.

“We believe that Myanmar/Burma army and other Burmese security forces have no right to stop the implementation of the of the ANC,” said email.

The ANC views the group as “illegal immigrants.”

“Are there different peoples in Arakan history, but not the Rohingyas,” he said.

U Taw Zaw blamed poor governance for the violence, including what he described as mishandling of the "immigration issue".

"There is huge number of illegal immigrants in Arakan because of the corruption at the local government level," U Taw Zaw said. "As a consequence, Arakan also has become the chief origin and transit point for illegal immigrants, the Rakhine State is desperate for self-determination and autonomy because the central government (of Myanmar) is unable to establish Rakhine’s security, stability and development.

The ANC called on the government to negotiate with the Rohingya community.

When U Taw Zaw was asked about the proposed resettlement programme, he said it should apply to "illegal immigrants."
**KPMG opens office in Yangon**

By Stuart Deed

KPMG has opened an office in Myanmar in order to serve the “potential tremendous growth” of the country, the company’s chairman said last week.

The office, officially opened last week on 28 October, is located on Hlaing Road in Yangon’s Hlaing township, and operates through the Thailand branch of KPMG International and is the first of the so-called “big four” professional services companies to set up in Myanmar.

The office “will be the loudest,” it might be the guys in suits cheering, said the chairman of KPMG Australia, Michael Andrew, explaining why the company had opened an office in Myanmar over another ASEAN country.

Andrew, chairman of KPMG International and a global partner in the KPMG network, said the recent easing of many international sanctions against Myanmar has sparked a great deal of interest from investors globally, a KPMG press release issued on October 30 said.

With the easing of trade sanctions, Myanmar has the potential for tremendous growth, and many multinationals and other investors are already entering the market or exploring opportunities,” said Michael Andrew, chairman of KPMG International.

“In addition to the deep local knowledge and capabilities of the new office, KPMG can support clients in Myanmar with extensive global resources, including specialised practices in areas such as financial services, healthcare, hospitality and technology. There is also an opportunity to market products and services within Myanmar’s 51 percent and 49 percent of the country,” said Mr O’Carroll.

Digicel crafts hot-red public relations blitz

By Tim McLaughlin

Digicel Pacific, sports sponsorships

Singapore-based sports marketing, event management and media company, said Digicel’s strategy enables the company to reach out to potential clients directly.

“Through sponsorship, companies can interact directly with their consumers by creating unique and valuable experiences, in front of or near the goal in 90 minutes,” said Mr O’Carroll.

“The unusual scene is actually the result of an extremely successful marketing drive from a Jamaica-based, Irish-led telecoms firm that is, as yet, not operating in Myanmar.”

According to Frank O’Carroll, vice president of business development for Digicel Pacific, sports sponsorships are one of the few outreach programs employed by Digicel in target markets, the others are health initiatives, education programs and cultural events.

Andrew O’Carroll, chief operating officer at the World Sport Group, a

Ayeawady FC celebrate after winning the Digicel Cup in Yangon last week. Pic: Boothes

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countrywide unrest found the top of the podium at five consecutive SEA Games beginning in 1965.
How will the Dawei project benefit Myanmar?

Some industries are not suitable to be located in Thailand.

The Myanmar Times November 5 - 11, 2012

ITD to develop light industry in Dawei

THE Thai developer of the US$60-billion Dawei economic zone in Myanmar plans to invest more than 1 billion baht ($26 million) on infrastructure to help attract light industry amid unresolved project issues.

The plan includes building a 35-megawatt power plant plus road and water systems on the 101 hectares of land designated for light industry, Somchet Thinsamut, managing director of Dawei Development Co, told Reuters in mid-September.

“We are arranging land areas of 653 rais [101 hectares] for the light industries. For heavy industry, we are still working on that,” he said.

He said the company had already lined up companies keen to invest in the light industry zone but declined to give names.

Somecret said the small power plant would use natural gas as fuel – Dawei-Thailand, Development, Thailand’s largest construction firm, was working on how to supply the gas.

Italian-Thai has been struggling to find financial backing for the 250-square-kilometre complex, which was planned to include a deepsea port, steel mills, refineries, a petrochemical complex and power plants.

Italian-Thai said it aimed to conclude financial plans for the project by the end of this year.

But it has struggled to find $8.5 billion to finance infrastructure and utilities under the first phase and the governments of Thailand and Japan have kept it afloat.

In September, sources said Thai banks would provide short-term loans before an expected injection of up to $3.2 billion could be secured.

Alack of basic infrastructure such as roads and ports have made it difficult for the Dawei project to get off the ground, CIMB Securities said in a research note.

Instead, the Thai government approved a budget of $1.1 billion for infrastructure inside Thailand that would link up with the zone, including a four-kilometre road to the border and homes for Thais who would work in the zone.

“Some points of view matter more than others,” said Somchet.

The ambitious Dawei project was announced to the public in late 2010 but has hit a number of roadblocks since then, including U Zaw Zaw’s planned pullout, the axing of a planned 4000-megawatt coal-fired power plant on environmental grounds and the greatest threat of all – the failure of developer Italian-Thai to secure funding.

Somchet Thinsamut, the managing director of the Dawei Development Co Ltd, said a gradual withdrawal from Myanmar is a possibility.

Mr Somchet said Dawei needs $8.5 billion to support the project gradually, he confirmed to Reuters in a phone interview on July 4.

The ambitious Dawei project was announced to the public in late 2010 but has hit a number of roadblocks since then, including U Zaw Zaw’s planned pullout, the axing of a planned 4000-megawatt coal-fired power plant on environmental grounds and the greatest threat of all – the failure of developer Italian-Thai to secure funding.

Somchet Thinsamut, the managing director of the Dawei Development Co Ltd, said a gradual withdrawal from Myanmar is a possibility.

“Some industries are not suitable to be located in Thailand,” he said.

Mr Somchet, who is going to turn up for a meeting of the Thai-Myanmar economic zone planned for Thilawa in Yangon’s Thanlyin township seems a much better bet: The workers, basic infrastructure, services and communications are already there, and Japanese and Chinese businesses and the government are already there. These means the funding should not be a problem in the same way that it has been in Dawei.

For its part, the Asian Development Bank has already allocated US$26 million for the project.

“The viability of such a rail link to augment the development project is largely dependent on Japanese funding,” Mr Somchet said.

“Otherwise, we will not have the financial capacity to fund such a massive development project. We have to bank on others to provide us the financial support.”

But unless wages and working conditions on offer at the project are competitive, who is going to turn up for the project?” he said.
Visa partners with three domestic banks

By Zaw Win Than

VISA, the world’s largest payment network, signed its first licensing agreements in Myanmar with three domestic banks at Sedona Hotel in Yangon on November 3. The domestic banks are Kanbawza, Co-operative and Myanmar Oriental.

The agreements will establish arrangements for Visa-branded payment cards to be accepted in Myanmar, a development that will support the growth of Myanmar’s financial infrastructure and help the country to integrate with the international economy.

Visa-branded cards will now be able to be used at automatic teller machines and point-of-sale machines at selected locations. By joining the Visa network, the banks agree to adhere to Visa’s network operating regulations and security standards, a press release said.

“We are proud to partner with Kanbawza, Co-operative, and Myanmar Oriental banks under the leadership of the Central Bank of Myanmar in leading the charge to enable the economic and societal benefits of electronic payments for Myanmar’s economy, its people and tourists,” said Mr Peter Maher, Visa Group country manager of Southeast Asia and Australasia.

“As Myanmar develops its financial infrastructure, we will work hand-in-hand with our partners to enable safe, secure and convenient electronic payments across the country,” he said.

Visa’s licensing agreement with the banks will bring immediate benefits to tourists who will be able to use their Visa credit, debit and prepaid cards in the country.

“Today’s event and announcement is an important milestone for Myanmar’s economic development and the development of the payment and settlement system which is one of the financial infrastructures in Myanmar,” said U Mg Mg Win, chairman of the Myanmar Payment Union.

“Visa’s licensing agreement with Kanbawza Bank, Cooperative Bank and Myanmar Oriental Bank will help and integrate Myanmar further into the global economy,” he said.

He added that the partnership would help to connect Myanmar into the global electronic payment system.

“Due to this agreement, there will be greater financial inclusion in Myanmar to access digital currency, and this will lead the way towards the country’s economic development,” U Mg Mg Win said.

According to the most recent Visa Global Travel Intentions survey, 64 percent of international travellers prefer to pay by card when travelling in the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, 51pc of respondents said they would withdraw cash from ATMs, if they were readily available in the destination country.

The Visa licensing agreement is a significant development for Myanmar ahead of international events, such as the Southeast Asian Games in December next year, the World Economic Forum for East Asia 2013, and the country’s 2014 chairmanship of ASEAN.

Mr Maher said Visa is committed to continuing to support the development of the country’s electronic payments infrastructure as international business and tourist arrivals grow at a rapid pace.

“These are three important banks [but] I’m sure there will be more banks in Myanmar to join with Visa in the future,” he added.
Malaysia eyes rubber, oil plantations in Myanmar

By Myat May Zin

MALAYSIA is eyeing Myanmar as a possible site for a palm oil and rubber plantations and a refinery, a senior Malaysian government minister said last week.

Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities Mr Tan Sri Bernard Dompok said Malaysian companies were keen to pursue opportunities in Myanmar.

Speaking at a press conference on November 1, the minister said: “Malaysia and Myanmar trade in three main sectors: palm oil, rubber and timber. We see how we can maximise long-standing business relationships between the two countries.”

He might discuss this with the president and the agriculture ministry during my trip to Myanmar. Malaysia has long experience in the plantation sector, and can share that experience,” he said.

The plantation would be set up as a joint venture, and the choice of partners would depend on decisions yet to be taken by businesspeople on both sides,” he added.

Malaysia’s climate was similar to that of Malaysia, he said.

“We have the idea to establish a rubber plantation in the southern part of Myanmar. We will set up the refinery industry near the port,” he said.

“We cannot say how much tonnes of palm oil will be produced and how many hectares of plantation will be here. I hope to provide more details in my next visit,” he added.

The director of the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), Mr Zulkifli Mohd. Pera said Malaysian businesspeople were interested in palm oil industries in Myanmar along the borders with China and Thailand, which hamper the government’s ability to gather accurate trade data and collected taxes, he said.

Consumer products such as fuel, food and drugs are imported without permission and taxation, and jade and gems, animals and mining products are illegally exported.

The most important illegally imported product is fuel, followed by edible palm oil, alcoholic drinks, cigarettes not approved by the Food and Drugs Administration, LPG gas, electronic products and automobiles, U Nyunt Aung said.

Illegal trading also reduces the quality of products available on the market, he added.

The Ministry of Commerce has announced the deployment of mobile teams to crack down on illegal cross-border trading (see related story below).

Illegal border trade thriving

IN DEPTH with Aye Thidar Kyaw

ILLEGAL trading across the country’s borders is nine times as high as legal commerce, greatly reducing customs revenues, trade officials admit.

The latest figures for the 2012-13 fiscal year, which began in April, put the Myanmar estimate for trade across the Thai border at US$85 million. But according to the Thai side, the figure came to US$1 million – a difference of about $736 million, or 900 percent.

“We found that the illegal trade is nine times as large as legal trade. We have to obstruct that,” said U Nyunt Aung, deputy director general of the border trade department.

Speaking at an October 26 meeting on border trade promotion at the Ministry of Commerce in Yangon, U Nyunt Aung said: “The government has done a lot to liberalise trade policy since the 2011-12 fiscal year. But as of September, trade volume is only half what we expected. We hope it will reach the target we’ve set for the end of this year.”

The ministry allowed trade in 29 previously banned items, including tinned food and drinks, chewing gum, seasoning powder and 32 different kinds of alcohol. It also cut commercial tax to about 8pc. The ministry also issues trading licences to small traders, the meeting was told.

“The main reason for the gap is staff shortages. We don’t have enough staff to check goods at the border gates, and there are too many alternative routes into the country,” he said.

There are more than 20 routes into Myanmar along the borders with China and Thailand, which hamper the government’s ability to gather accurate trade data and collected taxes, he said.

‘Mobile teams to crack down on illicit trade

By Shwe Wah Lwin and Haing Kyaw Soe

TRADE officials are to launch a crackdown on smuggling, the government has announced.

Deputy director of border trade U Thein Htun Oo said mobile teams would be used to reduce and eradicate contraband.

The teams would take action at cross-border trading points, airports, seaports and markets, and would involve the police, Customs department, local administrative offices, business associations and the media.

Importers or exporters who trade without permission, or bend the rules, would be targeted as the teams sought to block illegal channels and enforce the use of legal channels.

“The teams will work on blocking illegal trading channels and illegal trading within the radius of between five and 10 miles from border trade points. They will be able to call in reinforcements according to security circumstances,” said U Thein Htun Oo.

The teams will conduct spot checks at border crossing points, airports, seaports and markets.

The first step is an “educational period” from November 1 to December 31, which may be extended or shortened as necessary. “The commodities covered by the license will be inspected in negotiation with the customs department. We will confiscate any contraband we find,” he said, adding; “Since the educational period has expired, in May, we have found commodities being carried without an import licence where demand is high. But they are awaiting the final passage of the amended foreign investment law.”

The delegation led by the minister visited the provinces on October 31 in Nay Pyi Taw and discussed promoting trade and investment between the two countries, as well as cooperation in the production of palm oil, rubber and forestry products.
Imports undercut domestic salt producers

By San Yamin Aung

MYANMAR's salt industry is withering under the onslaught of high-quality imports from Thailand, traders said last week. Salt production has fallen by up to 40 percent this year, said U Myint Than, a trader-based in Ayeyarwady Region's Labutta township. “Domestic salt production has fallen by about 40 percent this year, and that's due to salt imported from Thailand instead,” he said. Even though salt from Thailand is nearly four times as costly as domestically produced salt, the whole price for Thai salt is about K270 a viss (1 viss is 1.6 kilograms or 3.6 pounds), while domestically made salt is K75-80 a viss, he said.

"Thai salt conquers the entire market after Nargis. But Myanmar's salt industry is tiny compared with other industries – it's a small kitchen product," said U Myint Than. “Thai salt is a high quality product but we need Myanmar salt, even if we can't compete on quality," said U Thant Zin, owner of Sein Mittar salt mill.

However, he said about 30pc of the salt produced annually is surplus to requirement. He added that 70pc of the salt produced locally is used for industrial purposes and the remaining 30pc is used in kitchens.

"Thai salt entered after our domestic production was destroyed by Cyclone Nargis but our production has recovered, so we need to control imports again," U Thant Zin said.

There are 260 salt farmers in Rakhine State but only 72 were registered in 2012. In Ayeyarwady Region, 480 farmers applied for licences to produce salt, compared with more than 700 before Nargis.

Translated by Zar Zar Soe


Pic: Myanmar Times Archive/Than Htike Oo

South Korea aims for expo trade boost

By Aye Thidar Kyaw

SOUTH Korean products and arts will be the centerpiece of a trade promotion event beginning in Yangon on November 8, a Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency spokesperson said last week.

The event will feature booths from 56 companies, such as Posco, LG, Daewoo, Kia Motors, Dousan Infracore and KD Power, and showcase goods such as kitchen products, foodstuffs, medicines, electronics, automobiles and vehicle parts from November 8-11 at the Myanmar Convention Center.

The event will coincide with the Korea Film Festival and the 6th Korean Ambassador's Cup Taekwondo championship, as well as a Korean language contest that will be held from November 9 to 14.

South Korean companies, such as Hanwha Petrochemicals, Lotte Conglomerate, CJ Group and SK Telecoms have recently opened offices in Yangon, with Hana Bank and Samsung Construction and Trade planning to establish offices soon, the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson said there are about 150 South Korean companies, employing about 50,000 Myanmar workers, operating in Myanmar. Myanmar President U Thein Sein visited South Korea from October 8-10, and discussed trade, investment, construction and infrastructure during meetings with South Korean President Mr Lee Myung-bak.

However, Mr Park Chulho, KOTRA's commercial attaché, said the talks had failed to show results yet. "The two leaders only talked one month ago and we have not seen the results yet. However, I can certainly say that [South] Korea will invest in various sectors in Myanmar, especially in construction, hotels and tourism," he said.

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Dated: 5th November, 2012
Property sales ‘sluggish’ post-Thadingyut

By Htar Htar Khin

EVEN though Buddhist Lent has come to a close with the end of Thadingyut on October 31, sales activity in the real estate market is sluggish, agents said last week.

Traditionally, Buddhist Lent is a period when non-essential house- and home-buying is shunned but its end usually heralds a rush of activity. But high property prices, an increase in property sales tax in mid-August and uncertainty surrounding the amended foreign investment law are creating a “wait and see” climate for possible buyers.

Ko Nyi Nyi, a supervisor at Khit Thit real estate agency in Lammadaw township, said demand is less than enquiries. I would guess the end of Thadingyut is poor sales at the Tarmwe township,” he said. “Sales demand at the end of Thadingyut is poor and we’re only seeing a few enquiries. I would guess that demand is less than half what it was at this time last year,” he said.

He said buyers were reluctant to invest in real estate because prices are too high. “The only people who are buying are those who plan to use it themselves, there are few speculators looking for residential plots. However, there are plenty of people looking to buy land on the outskirts,” Ko Nyi Nyi added.

However, he said prices for prime commercial locations were skyrocketing. “Properties in good locations are fetching incredible prices. Some locations on Kabar Aye Pagoda Road are selling for more than double what they were last year. Some locations are selling for K700,000 a square foot, up from K400,000,” he said.

Daw Moh Moh Aung from Win Shwe Wah real estate agency in Kyauktada township, said her agency is focusing most of its attention on Thanlyin township and other outer townships.

“I think potential buyers are quite reluctant because of rising property prices,” she said.

Ko Maung Maung Gyi said he doubted that the enactment of the amended foreign investment law would have a significant impact on the market. “I think enacting the investment law would bring some buyers back to the market but the bigger problem is the tax – if you can’t show where you’ve made your money you must pay a tax equal to 30% of the property, which is a major problem.”

YCDC moots new housing project

YANGON City Development Committee announced last week that it is planning to build an affordable housing project in North Dagon township.

The 134-acre development will be built on Bo Ba Htoo Street in North Dagon township’s 49th ward. YCDC stated through an announcement in the state-run New Light of Myanmar newspaper on October 31.

The article said development will include “recreation centre, playgrounds, car parking, shopping malls, mini marts and well-ventilated and lighted apartments” and apartments will be sold to the public at a “fair price”, although these were not disclosed.

The notice called for interested contractors and bankers to contact YCDC by November 7 at the latest and a public meeting to explain the project will be held at City Hall at 8am on November 14.

– Htar Htar Khin
**Property**

**November 5 - 11, 2012**

**Mumbai home sales fall**

MUMBAI, India – Home sales in Mumbai, India’s most expensive property market, fell in the quarter ended September as record prices and a surge in supply slowed demand, said Liases Foras Real Estate Rating and Research. Sales slid 12.2 percent to 9.75 million square feet in the quarter ended September 30, from 11.385 million square feet in the previous quarter, said Pankaj Kapoor, founder of Liases Foras, a Mumbai-based real estate research company. Prices in Mumbai rose 1.9pc to a record 11.31 US$211 a square foot, he said.

The Mumbai market has become inefficient, high prices are hurting affordability, Kapoor said in a telephone interview from Mumbai. “Supply has increased but sales haven’t kept pace.”

Kapoor’s efficiency index, which measures the impact on demand given the increase in property prices, fell 4pc to 11.66 in the quarter from the previous three months, Kapoor said. The index is near a record low and continues to fall, in the quarter in June 2009, he said.

Kapoor estimated all-India left interest rates unchanged at 8pc to fight price pressures while cutting lenders’ reserve requirements to boost a policy aimed by the government aimed at reviving growth. Governor Raghuram Rajan of the Reserve Bank of India said in Mumbai on October 30. Sales in Hyderabad gained the most, increasing 46pc to 4.09 million square feet in the quarter after dropping to their lowest levels in more than three years, data compiled by Liases Foras showed. Sates in the western Indian city of Pune gained 27pc to 11.31 million square feet.

**Hong Kong announces measures to cool property market**

HONG KONG – Hong Kong announced on October 26 it will raise real-estate buying and resale costs to cool its overheating property market down, in a move targeting non-local buyers and speculators. The prices of small and medium units in Hong Kong were up 2.4pc in the three months ending September from the previous month, with 19 of 20 cities showing gains, the Case-Shiller report released on October 30 showed. Seattle was the exception, showing a 0.1pc decline. Unadjusted prices climbed 0.9pc.

The softening in unadjusted prices that typically happens around this time of year as sales cool may be exacerbated in the short-run by supply pressure, said Khan. “We could see in the Northeast in particular a little bit of a pullback in home sales,” Khan said.

The month-to-month declines are going to be because of the seasonally slow time of year, she said. Lenders may put transactions on hold in the affected areas until properties can be inspected for damage, said David Stevens, president of the Mortgage Bankers Association. Homes in seven states valued at almost US$88 billion were at risk of having been damaged, said a report by CoreLogic Inc, a mortgage software and data firm in Irvine, California. The year-over-year gauge provides better indications of trends in prices, according to the S&P/Case-Shiller group. The panel includes Karl Case and Robert Shiller, the economists who created the index.

Seventeen of the 20 cities in the index showed a year-over-year gain, led by 18.6pc in Phoenix. Atlanta led declines, with a 6.1pc drop. The sustained good news in home prices over the past five months makes us optimistic for continued recovery in the housing market, David Blitzer, chairman of the index committee, said in a statement.

The pickup may be helping gain confidence. The Thomson Reuters/University of Michigan sentiment gauge advanced this month to the highest level since September 2007, before the recession began.

Household purchases, which account for about 70pc of gross domestic product, rose 0.8pc in September, the most since February, Commerce Department data showed on October 29.

A drop in borrowing costs to record lows, thanks in part to the Fed’s open-ended commitment to buy $40 billion of mortgage debt a month, may continue to buoy the housing market.

The average rate on a 30-year, fixed-rate loan was at 3.41pc last week compared with 3.36pc in early October that was the lowest in data going back to 1972, according to Freddie Mac. Americans bought new homes in September at the fastest pace in two years, the Commerce Department reported in late October, with demand up 27.1pc from a year ago.

By Lorraine Woellert

There are early signs that the US housing market is on the mend, with prices in 20 cities rising the most in two years. **Pic: AFP**
WE live in a chaos of electromagnetic energy. Visible, infrared and ultraviolet light courses omnidirectionally from the sun. A fraction of it bathes our planet, while some bounces off other planets, moons, comets and meteoroids. The visible light from stars up to 4000 light-years away can be seen from Earth with the naked eye. With instruments, astronomers can detect gamma rays from stars 13 billion light-years away. Radio waves from remote galaxies help Earth’s official timekeepers monitor our planet’s path around the sun.

Once a day, a minuscule stream of radio waves joins this cacophony, making the 13.8-minute trip from an antenna on Earth to an SUV-size machine parked on the surface of Mars. These short-lived waves represent our way – our only way – of communicating with Curiosity, the rover that NASA landed on Mars in August.

How, exactly, does information flow between NASA and its correspondent on Mars? Earthbound engineers exchange messages with Curiosity on a set daily schedule. Actually, “daily” isn’t quite accurate. Mars takes about 37 minutes longer than Earth to complete a rotation, so astronomers refer to a Martian day as a “sol” for the sake of clarity. From here on, when I refer to a time, it’s Mars time.

At about 10am each sol, after the sun peaks over the Martian horizon and floods the landscape near the rover in light, NASA sends a packet of commands to Curiosity. Since a sol doesn’t coincide with an Earth day, the agency can’t always use the same antenna on Earth, which might not be facing Mars at the right moment. Instead, NASA uses the Deep Space Network, a system of antennae in the Mojave Desert and in Spain and Australia.

The content of the instructions encoded in these radio waves depends on the sol. On many sols, the rover doesn’t move a Martian inch. It digs into the soil, for example, or spends its time analysing the mineral contents of onboard samples it has collected.

When NASA does tell Curiosity to move, the process is deliberate. First, the engineers use imagery from the rover itself and from orbiters passing overhead to create a three-dimensional model of the surroundings. It is critically important to ensure that, wherever they direct the machine to go, it will not face any hazards. (Spirit’s six-year tour of Mars ended in 2009 when that rover got stuck in a sand pit.)

When NASA is convinced a destination is safe, it transmits a set of coordinates for where the rover should go. NASA will also include a suggested path, but the rover has autonomy to make changes if necessary.

A set of commands also tells Curiosity when it should listen for a new set of instructions. There are contingency plans, so the rover is prepared if a transmission is delayed or missed for some reason. In the event that no instructions come for several sols, the rover takes protective action. It is programmed to stop conducting scientific missions, stays put and listens for communications at predetermined times.

More important to the average Mars enthusiast than this daily to-do list is the information travelling from Curiosity to Earth. Those transmissions comprise a few panoramas that the rover has taken, again at 3am.

A ‘stunning’ start for Windows 8: Ballmer

SAN FRANCISCO – Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer said on October 30 the Windows 8 operating system was off to a “stunning” start with four million upgrades downloaded since its release on October 26.

“Not just the last three days, we have sold four million Windows 8 upgrades,” Ballmer said while kicking off a BUILD Conference for developers at the software giant’s headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

“The level of embrace from enthusiasts is very, very high.”

Analysts have predicted Windows 8 as a bet for Microsoft since it dramatically changed the long-familiar user interface to adapt to touch-screen mobile devices increasingly popular in modern lifestyles.

“The level of enthusiasm seen for the new products has really been stunning,” Ballmer told the thousands of developers at the sold-out event.

Globally popular one-to-many text messaging service Twitter and online file-sharing service Dropbox are among applications being tailored to Windows 8, Ballmer told third-party software developers at the gathering.

Microsoft kicked off sales of its revamped Windows 8 system and Surface tablet on October 26 as it ramped up efforts to compete in a market shifting rapidly from PCs to mobile devices.

Microsoft on October 29 set out to win over iPhone and Android gadget devotees with Windows 8 smartphones, new devices that emphasise individualism and unify digital lives in the internet cloud.

The global rollout of Windows 8 phones, set to begin in Europe on November 3, is the final piece in a Microsoft operating system transformation aimed at harmonising the technology titan’s software and hardware for mobile lifestyles.

The operating system has a user interface based on “tiles” that can be personalised with people’s pictures, applications, games, music and more.

On the line, for 259,132 years

(THE Mars Express orbiter, operated by the European Space Agency, is also available if necessary.) The antenna on the orbiter are more than 13 billion miles as determined by the antenna on Curiosity. The rover waits for the orbiters to pass overhead to stop its messages, usually about 3pm and about 3am.

“The contents of the composite panoramas that the rover has sent to Earth comprise a few hundred megabytes of data,” says Edward. “Curiosity would take weeks to send that much data. Using the relays, we can have it in a day.”

Since most of us live in a world where our laptops can lose WiFi signals if we walk too far from a tower, it may seem incredible that NASA can control a robot million upon million of miles away. Curiosity, however, is relatively close by space communications standards. Voyager 1 is the most distant human-made object in the universe. It’s about three times the distance to Pluto, while some communications in the 1980s, we’re still able to receive information from the spacecraft.

Talk about roaming. Maybe NASA should take its telecommunications here on Earth. Just a thought. – THE Washington Post
New York struggles back to life

NEW YORK – The toll of death and suffering from superstorm Sandy mounted on November 1 even as New York struggled back to life, with the first subway trains rolling in four days after the hurricane on the night of October 29.

Fuel shortages led to long lines of cars at filling stations in many states and the country faced a storm bill that some economists have estimated at US$50 billion.

With about 650,000 people still without power in New York, Bloomberg said the city would start handing out food and water and police would go into high-rise buildings to help the elderly. The Con-Edison power company said some New Yorkers would have to wait until November 11 before electricity was restored.

New Jersey suffered the most widespread destruction, with at least 12 people reported dead in the state and 50,000 people out of power in the New York suburbs. At least 88 people have now been reported dead across 15 American states hit by the hurricane.

But although the data was far from spectacular – with 171,000 jobs created last month – there was enough in the report, including upward revisions of previous monthly figures, for Obama to argue the economy was improving.

Obama highlighted the fact that, although the economy is creating jobs at a moderate pace, unemployment remains at historically high levels.

“For four years, President Obama’s policies have crushed America’s middle class,” Romney said in a statement.

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“The candidate who wins the state-by-state map wins the election,” said Romney, who started heading to Wisconsin and Iowa, his possible tipping point state, before race.

On November 2, Romney highlighted the fact that, although the economy was improving, “the average American family has seen its wealth fall by $17,000 since the White House moved in.”

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After several weeks of polls suggesting a neck-and-neck race, there were new signs that Obama’s position, as he seeks a second term, may be solidifying.

The release of the final major economic data before the election had worried Obama aides who feared that a leap in the rate above the psychological eight percent mark could have sent late-deciding voters to Romney.

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Obama, Romney race to finish
Sandy wreaks havoc from the Caribbean to Canada

NEW YORK – New York struggled to get back on its feet on October 30 after superstorm Sandy carved a path of destruction from the Caribbean to Canada that left at least 110 people dead and millions without power. The cyclone drove hurricane-force winds and deadly ocean surges against a large swathe of the US East Coast, adding an uncertain twist to an election season that was to tour flooded areas on October 30, isolated outbuildings of orange flames still lashed at the sprawling, blackened pile that was all that remained of one of Breezy Point’s most beloved beachfront areas after the hurricane tore through the Caribbean.

“Restoring power and mass transit remain the two biggest challenges in New York’s recovery, both of which are consuming over $2 billion per week,” said a warzone,” said Anderson, 58.

Dan O’Leary, 62, said Breezy Point residents can’t forget the power of the sea and sky. But he’d never imagined seeing such destruction.

“Where you live by the sea. You expect water, you can live on Breezy Point, so close to nature, carried risk. But not fire,” he said. “This is like a warzone, said Anderson, 58.

It’s not clear yet what ignited the fire in the middle of this warzone. The Department of Energy said insured losses from the massive superstorm Sandy could run between US$7 billion to US$15 billion, showed initial industry estimates.

The destruction was not limited to New York. Cities up and down the Eastern Seaboard from Boston to Philadelphia to Washington were battered by storm-force winds and coastal communities suffered widespread flooding.

“Fire and water don’t mix? Tell that to the shell-shocked residents of New York’s Breezy Point, where the entire neighborhood was wiped out in a hellish blizzard of fire and flood during superstorm Sandy.”

On October 30, isolated outbreaks of orange flames still lashed at the sprawling, blackened pile that was all that remained of one of Breezy Point’s most beloved beachfront areas after the hurricane tore through the Caribbean.

“Sandy wrought havoc on the US East Coast that left at least 110 people dead and millions without power.”

Meanwhile, authorities and citizens in America’s biggest city struggled to restore vital services and clear debris after a wall of storm-driven seawater swamped road and rail tunnels and triggered massive fires.

“Still, the price you pay for living by the sea,” said Kirk, 55. His own house is going up.”

“Water’s going to be an ongoing problem, said Judge. “This is Ocean Avenue,” he said, showing a small patch of water where streets had been.

“Is this a warzone, said Anderson, 58.

More than eight million homes and businesses from the Carolinas to Maine were without power on October 30, the Department of Energy said.

“The price you pay for living by the sea,” said Judge. “We have a plan for recovery and that recovery is already beginning, I’m happy to say. This is the end of the downside, and hopefully from here it is going up.”

Before things could improve, however, the New York subway system, much of which was flooded by seawater, will need to recover from what management dubbed its worst disaster in its 108-year history.

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Benghazi mission ‘a CIA operation’

WASHINGTON – The US mission in Benghazi that came under attack by militants on September 11 was mainly a secret CIA operation, the White House reported on November 2.

The Obama administration has faced questions about the security of the US mission in Benghazi and the role of other foreign officials, including ambassador Chris Stevens, who were killed on September 11.

The Journal also said that of the 20 American officials evacuated from Benghazi, only six were able to stay seven worked for the State Department.

17-year sentence for model plane plot

BOSTON – An American supporter of al-Qaeda was sentenced on November 1 to 17 years in prison for plotting to bomb the Pentagon and US Capitol with remote-controlled model planes laden with explosives.

Rezwan Ferdaus pleaded guilty in July to the plot on November 17. His 17-year prison term will be reduced by 30 months from supervised release, a Justice Department statement said.

Ferdaus, 27, was arrested in September 2011 as part of an undercover operation in which FBI agents posed as al-Qaeda supporters.

Israel admits killing Abu Jihad

JERUSALEM – Israel has for the first time admitted assassinating the PLO’s former number two, Abu Jihad, in a raid on the move of his wife, President Robert Alia, on October 30 as her husband, President Robert Alia.

Abu Jihad, whose real name was Khalil Al-Wazir, was shot dead in the early hours of April 16, 1988 in a room at the United Nations, the PLO headquarters by what was presumed to be Israeli agents.

Ministry defends $16,000 snare bill

LONDON – Britain’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office has published a snare bill of £16,000 ($24,000) to re-stuff a giant anaconda recovered on November 1.

A security guard later told the anaconda to re-stuff a giant anaconda that he had, in a raid on the move of its 30 American officials since November 1.

Tripoli – Libya’s national assembly gave its approval on October 31 to a cabinet presented by prime minister designate Ali Zeidan weeks after rejecting his predecessor’s line-up.

But in a sign of the fragility of the country’s transition to democracy a year after the removal of veteran dictator Moammar Gadhafi, protests erupted around the assembly building for a second day in a row.

Zeidan, the second premier designate to try to form a government since the assembly was elected in July, had presented 30-member line-up including both liberals and Islamists.

The General National Congress gives its confidence to the government of Ali Zeidan,” the official Lana news agency reported.

A total of 105 members voted in favour, 18 abstained and nine voted against.

Protests erupted outside the assembly minutes after the vote, witnesses said.

Security forces fired in the air as they struggled to prevent a repetition of chaos in the previous episodes when demonstrators broke into the chamber denting its first attempt at a vote.

More than a dozen security vehicles were stationed at the assembly building and a crowd of about 300 demonstrators had gathered outside the main gate which was shut tight, an AFP photographer reported.

“The blood of our martyrs was not spilled in vain,” chanted some, while others said they had come to air their objections to some of the ministers.

There were no visible efforts to negotiate with the crowd but a security source contacted inside the building said the situation was “under control” and that assembly members had managed to block the building after the session.

Zeidan was elected prime minister after his predecessor, Mustafa Abu Shama, was dismissed in a vote of no confidence as the assembly rejected his proposed line-up as unrepresentative of Libya’s many factions.

“I am a long-time Kadafi oppositionist, no one from this family, I have always been outside,” he said. “I was not against Kadafi, no one from this family will be an oppositionist to Kadafi.”

His 17-year prison term will end in 2030, as the government of Ali Zeidan was known.

If he is released after seven years, he will have to maintain and the work of the PLO research reactor.

200-foot (six-metre) long anaconda is believed to have been lost to illegal killings this year, the government said.

Zimbabwean First Lady Grace Mugabe listens in Harare as she is sworn in as president of parliament ahead of elections next March. The elections are expected to end an uneasy coalition government formed in 2009 between Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai.

Pic: AFP

Rhinoceros toll soars in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG – More than 90 rhinos have been killed in South Africa in the two weeks to October 30, adding to 488 the toll of the pachyderms slaughtered this year, the government said.

“A total of 488 rhinos have been lost to illegal killings since the beginning of this year,” said a government statement on October 30, up from 450 reported killed on October 16.

“At least 50 rhinos were killed over the past two weeks,” said the ministerial affairs spokesperson Ali Modise told AFP.

South Africa is home to the world’s largest rhino population, with more than 18,000 white rhino and about 1,000 critically endangered black rhino.

Last year, a total of 448 rhinos were poached, up from 335 in 2010 and just 13 in 2009.

Most of the rhinos are killed in the world-famous Kruger National Park and their horns turn up on the black market in Vietnam, China and other east Asian nations where they are worth their weight in gold.

Iran averted showdown: Barak

LONDON – Iran averted a showdown over its nuclear program by getting a third of its medium-enriched uranium to civilian use, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said on October 31.

The decision put back any immediate plans Iran had for acquiring a nuclear bomb, but Barak said the Daily Telegraph the “moment of truth” had only been delayed by “eight to 10 months.”

Barak said that he had been “persuading the US government for years to work on this issue.”

Over 650 rounds of negotiations between world powers and Iran have failed to produce much progress on increasing the transparency of Tehran’s nuclear program, Barak said.

It is a key to developing nuclear weapons.

No date has yet been set for the opening of the Int’l Class 35 hate-mill. On October 31, the Int’l Class 35 hate-mill.

‘It could probably be a diplomatic gambit to keep the world from the Int’l Class 35 hate-mill.’

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He insisted that the government had the right to act on its own and that a protocol could be less risky than waiting until Iran had reached out to all the main political factions in forming his government.

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‘It could probably be a diplomatic gambit to keep the world from the Int’l Class 35 hate-mill.’
**World-first operation gives Australian boy new hope**

**LONDON** – British Prime Minister David Cameron was battling to reclaim authority on November 1 after rebels in his Conservative party delivered his first major parliamentary defeat by defying him over the EU budget.

Lawmakers passed a motion late on Monday urging Cameron to insist on a real-terms cut in the European Union’s trillion-euro 2014-2020 budget at a summit in Brussels next month.

While the vote is not binding on Cameron, it is a significant defeat for the Conservative-led coalition since it came to power in 2010.

Cameron had tried to stave off a rebellion by promising to veto any above-inflation increase of the EU budget, which has become increasingly contentious as austerity measures bite across the continent.

He insists that a seven-year real-terms cut in EU spending is the best next option for Britain, which has the highest share of the bloc’s 27 member states after the US.

"Using innovative radio frequency technology, we were able to effectively zap the nerves and deliver an electrical current to the patient's renal arteries," surgeon Ian Meredith from the Monash Heart Institute, at Melbourne’s Alfred Hospital, told AFP.

"We didn’t know whether it was going to work in a child, whether it was appropriate to do in a child and whether it should be done in a person with such a complex set of medical problems."

But on balance we collectively as a team felt it was in Matthew’s interests and grounds it would be a good thing to do." The instrument used, a small balloon with electrodes on its surface, had to be specially designed for keyhole insertion into Matthew’s tiny arteries by an American firm.

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Meredith’s dad’s mother was able to try the renal denervation procedure — never before performed on a child and still experimental with adult — went before three separate ethics panels before it was approved.

"We don’t believe that it’s something he hasn’t been able to do for a while. It is a very small balloon with electrodes on its surface, it has to be specially designed for keyhole insertion into Matthew’s tiny arteries by an American firm."

"It may seem trivial but (it’s) something"

**MOSCOW** Mikhail Kalashnikov, the Russian who designed the AK-47 assault rifle, on October 30 called on President Putin to halt the decline at the legendary factory where he invented the weapon.

Kalashnikov, 92, and 16 colleagues signed an open letter addressed to Putin that described the situation as "a record low at the Izhmash motor and weaponry factory in Izhevsk in the central Russian region of Udmurtia.

"In the name of the veterans who have spent most of their lives working at Izhmash, we ask you to save our factory," the letter said.

Izhmash, which dates to 1807, is still one of the main producers of Kalashnikovs, including the famed AK-47 (also known as the "Kalash") and its derivatives.

However like other special exports and military enterprises, it has been hit by a wave of economic demand after the collapse of the Soviet Union and failure to get the kind of export deals, amid an increase in attempts to reach Europe on sub-standard vessels. Pic: AFP.

**Kalashnikov appeals to save factory**

**ROME** – Italy’s major parties were in disarray last week after an anti-establishment party called the Five Star Movement (M5S) made major gains in a regional election in Sicily.

The election on October 28 saw the M5S, led by comedian Beppe Grillo, cruise to third place on a tide of support from the disillusioned youth in Sicily.

"The Grillo vote is a message to the system, a warning to the traditional political class. My model is also a winning model," said Maria Centorrino, political science professor at the University of Messina in Sicily.

"The Grillo vote is a warning to the establishment to think twice about support from the disillusioned youth in Sicily."

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WASHINGTON – Mitt Romney has been a skilled businessman, a talented politician and an Olympic turnaround master, but his main job over the past six years, more than any other US president, has been running for office.

After registering first bid in 2008, a shift toward more conservative politics, victory in this year’s Republican primaries and then a task back to the centre, Romney can finally see the ultimate prize within his grasp.

With just days before the biggest night of his political life, Romney is in a dead heat with President Barack Obama.

Obama is the president emerged as an elusive figure, of many contradictions.

Barack Obama accepts the nomination for president on the last day of the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina on September 6, 2012. AFP

WASHINGTON – Mitt Romney speaks in Des Moines, Iowa, on January 3, at the start of the bitterly contested process to choose a Republican presidential candidate. Pic: AFP

With Romney, 65, has struggled to counter the image that suggests he is a a business executive, he has struggled to avoid the label of a political flip-flopper, a skilled deal-maker and he allied with the business acumen to the business environment.

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WASHINGTON – In a quirk of the US system, the candidates do not directly elect their presidents and vice presidents. Technically speaking, they “pick” electors in an Electoral College system. Here is how this unique system, laid out by the founding fathers, works:

- A total of 538 Electoral College votes are distributed among the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- Each state, and DC, has a minimum of three Electoral College votes, but those states with a larger population have more.
- California has 55 Electoral College votes.
- Texas, 38, and Florida, 29, making them the largest states up for grabs.
- Almost 40 states are seen as shoo-ins for either the major party candidates. Florida was tapped in August to be former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney’s running mate in the Republican bid to unseat President Barack Obama and reclaim the White House.

The two differed chamber for the president, the Senate, representing the state of Delaware, before Obama made him vice president. In more than three decades of office, he was absent due to illness. Having one referred to his health, he sometimes acted as the most dangerous vice president in US history, Biden maintained his role at the White House should be defined by strict constitutional limits. He has not been an echo chamber for the president, however. The two differed over foreign policy – Biden was against the war in Iraq, opposed by the then-President George W. Bush.

In Washington, Ryan has been known as a “sage” in American politics. He has led a class devotee, and has led a class of representatives devoted. Ryan is a prominent Irish-Catholic family in the US Congress. He was born in Wisconsin and continues to live in the state where he grew up. He has served in the US House of Representatives for decades, he has lived there all his life and continues to live on the street where he grew up. He has served in the US House of Representatives for decades, he has lived there all his life and continues to live on the street where he grew up.

Libertarian icon Ayn Rand was one of his biggest inspirations. He pored over books about philosophy. Ayn Rand, who was one of his biggest inspirations, but has a distinctly different view on many issues.

He was first elected to the Senate in 1972, when he was aged 29. Soon after, he lost his wife and baby daughter in a Yuletide car crash that left his two sons badly injured.

Biden raised his children with his wife Jill. As a chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, Biden met many of the leading actors on the world stage and was an outspoken critic of then-President George W. Bush’s foreign policy.

Unlike Obama, Biden was initially in favour of the Iraq invasion, but he was later critical of the war. He was tapped as secretary of state after Suddam Hussein was toppled.

Detractors in the Republican party also say Biden was against the first Gulf War in 1991, and that in 2006 he suggested that Iran was developing nuclear weapons. Biden met many of the leading actors on the world stage and was an outspoken critic of then-President George W. Bush’s foreign policy.

He also has an avid fitness routine. He has been a fan of like-minded exercise buffs in a gruelling workout in Congress where he chairs the House of Representatives foreign relations committee.

In Washington, Ryan has come to be known for his proposal to overhaul the US Medicare system. Ryan’s plan would decimate social security programs, especially Medicare health coverage for the elderly. As a sign of just how devoted he is to his mentor, Ryan is said to sleep on a couch in his congressional office, rather than renting a Washington house or apartment as most lawmakers do.

The death of Ryan’s father turned the then-teenager into an introspective, serious student who held odd jobs, joined the Latin and history clubs in school and became versed in supply-side economics. Ryan turned the then-teenager into an introspective, serious student who held odd jobs, joined the Latin and history clubs in school and became versed in supply-side economics.

Not to be outdone, Romney’s running mate Paul Ryan, an Ohio congressman, has his own plan to cut the deficit. Ryan’s plan would decimate social security programs, especially Medicare health coverage for the elderly. As a sign of just how devoted he is to his mentor, Ryan is said to sleep on a couch in his congressional office, rather than renting a Washington house or apartment as most lawmakers do.

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The slum next door to stylish Gangnam

NEW DELHI – As China’s Communist Party prepares for its centenary, thousands of self-immolations have spread and accelerated across Setul, a Tibetan refugee community in India, in an attempt to stop the Chinese government to put an end to this," said resident Kim Mi-Ran. "The irony of Guryong’s slum – and the factor most likely to lead to its eventual disappearance is that it sits on an area of prime real estate. Developers have long coveted it.

The land is privately owned, but the squatters have been there so long that they have acquired a quasi-legal status buttressed by the municipal government’s decision to grant them temporary residency cards last year. Earlier this year, a private developer proposed a plan to build low-rent accommodation to house Guryong residents and redevelop the land they vacate.

The Seoul authorities have since proposed a similar plan, but the two proposals have split the Tibetan community in the middle with a heated debate over which would be more expedient.

“We don’t trust politicians who make promises and never translate their words into action,” said Kim Mi-Ran.

Forcible eviction is an obvious concern and the authorities are particularly wary of taking extreme action.

An effort to force legal tenants out of the Setul district in 2009 triggered clashes that left five people and a police officer dead.

Park Won-Soon, a long-time liberal activist who was elected Seoul mayor last October, has made it clear that any solution in Guryong must reflect the opinions and interests of the residents.

“Under the current mayor, there is no question of using force to clear the squatters,” said Kim Myeong-sik, a government official told AFP.

For Kim Kye-Seong, a professor at Chung-Ang University who is the centre of social welfare, Guryong is a concentrated embodiment of everything that is wrong with South Korea’s rapid economic development.

“It’s a powerful symbol of inequality in our society,” he said, citing widening income gaps, the lack of support for a rapidly ageing population and the marginalisation of those left behind by the industries’ industrial drive. – AFP

SEOUl – Shadowed by the high-rises of Seoul’s wealthiest Gangnam district, Kim Bok-joo, 75, pulls a trolley of cardboard through a shanty town site uncomfortably in one of Asia’s most developed cities.

At a local recycling yard Kim smiles thinly as she counts out the money she gets for the load of boxes and packaging she spent all day collecting.

“This is all I can do to survive. I simply have no choice, because I live alone with no proper income,” she said.

Kim’s home is Guryong, a squally, sprawling slum of plywood and tarpaulin sheds settled in 1988 by squatters evicted from other areas in a push to beautify Seoul as it prepared to host the Olympic Games.

Nearly 25 years later, Guryong (which translates as “Nine Dragons”) has more than 2000 residents scrabbling a subsistence living with Third World poverty levels and little or no proper sanitation.

It’s as far from as removed as any village in the glitzy world of neighbouring Gangnam, a district of luxury boutiques and night clubs made famous by the show K-Pop, raising (Pei’s) global hit, “Gangnam Style.”

Taxi drivers have difficulty finding Guryong, although it is only separated from Gangnam by a six-lane high-speed covered area of 30 hectares (70 acres).

“Our village is Seoul’s biggy but it will not appear on any maps of the area,” said Lee Jung-koo, deputy head of the Guryong residents’ council.

Many of the residents are in their 70s or 80s and live there, most of them without any sort of state assistance.

“Many are engaged in unskilled jobs and earn their daily living,” Lee said.

The fact they don’t starve is largely down to help from volunteers and religious groups.

One of the many notable aspects of Guryong is the number of wooden crossers visible on the low-rise realine, marking dozens of ramshackle churches that cater to the community.

Another is that every inch of available land has been grubbed into small plots upon which residents grow vegetables to supplement their diet.

Guryong dwellings are all illegal structures, and gas and electricity supplies are not connected as it is.

A fire in January spread through the flimsy plywood slats in a matter of minutes.

A home that had been尚 when floods triggered by typhoons in July engulfed the area is still grown vegetables to supplement their diet.

The land is privately owned, but the squatters have been there so long that they have acquired a quasi-legal status buttressed by the municipal government’s decision to grant them temporary residency cards last year.

Earlier this year, a private developer proposed a plan to build low-rent accommodation to house Guryong residents and redevelop the land they vacate.

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"It’s a powerful symbol of inequality in our society."
Australia seeks closer ASEAN ties

SYDNEY – Australia will elevate its engagement with ASEAN and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a grouping and with its individual members and also relax into the habit of listening to them more as they talk about their region. The sweeping policy blueprint, Australia in the Asian Century, released on October 28, set a series of goals for the next 15 years to seize upon Asia’s rapid ascent as a global economic powerhouse. The ambitious plan is aimed at maximising links with booming China and other soaring Asian economies to power Australia into the world’s top 10 wealthiest nations by 2025.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard said, “I want to emphasise the sheer vitality of the economies that lie within ASEAN and their importance to Australia ... taken as a bloc it is our number two trading partner,” he told the newspaper.

Carr, speaking ahead of visits to Indonesia and Malaysia, added that ASEAN had been at the forefront of resolving disputes over territory in the South China Sea involving China. “ASEAN members want to see ASEAN prove itself on this issue,” he said. – AFP

Indonesians fume at maids ad

JAKARTA – An advertisement in Malaysia for cut-price Indonesian maids has gone viral online in Indonesia and sparked new outrage over an issue that has long divided the two countries.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa has phoned his Malaysian counterpart to complain and web users have vented their anger over the flyers tacked to trees in Kuala Lumpur, which read ‘Indonesian maids now on sale!’

“Now your housework and cooking come easy. You can rest and relax. Deposit only 1,500 ringgit ($1,150)” reads the ad, which was posted online on October 27-28 by an Indonesian campaigner for migrant workers’ rights.

“Let’s boycott travelling to Malaysia, they have become even more disrespectful,” said Arifin Sutrians on Twitter. Labour ministry spokeswoman Dita Indah Sari told AFP, “Saying Indonesian workers are on sale is likening a human being to a commodity. This is unacceptable.”

Relations have been strained by a series of cases of abuse of Indonesian women working as domestic helpers in Malaysia. Maids in recent years have been the victims of attacks with a hammer, scissors and a hot iron. The abuse prompted Jakarta to impose a ban in June 2009 on new maids being sent to Malaysia. Indonesia announced last December the ban was being lifted after both countries agreed on a pay rise and measures to curb abuse.

However the furious reaction in Indonesia to the flyers and the government’s swift response showed that the issue remains deeply sensitive.

Malaysian Labour Minister S. Subramaniam condemned the flyers. “We are going all out to trace the group responsible for the leaflets,” he said. – AFP

No deterrent

SYDNEY – Australia’s new policies designed to stem an influx of boat people will not deter thousands of asylum-seekers from heading to the country, a top Indonesian immigration official said on November 2.

Indonesia’s head of immigration enforcement, Dedi Muhammad, told public broadcaster ABC there were 100,000 people throughout Southeast Asia who wanted to leave for Australia and sending them offshore would not halt the tide.

Asked what the answer was to stopping people heading to Australia, he replied: “No answer.”

Fatal acid attack

MUZAFFARABAD – A mother and her father in Pakistan-administered Kashmir have admitted killing their 15-year-old daughter by dousing her up and downing her with acid after seeing her talking to a young man, police said on November 1.

Local police officer Tahir Ayub told AFP the girl was assaulted by her parents after her father, Muhammad Zafar, became enraged when he saw her with a boy outside their home on October 29. – AFP

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New urgency sought in malaria fight

SYDNEY – Asia accounts for most of the 46,000 annual malaria deaths occurring outside Africa, a report showed on November 2 as experts demand more urgency in fighting the deadly disease.

Leading scientists and health experts meeting in Sydney last week at the “Malaria 2012: Saving Lives in the Asia-Pacific” conference also want tougher political leadership and regional coordination.

International efforts to defeat malaria have focused on Africa, where most deaths occur. But of the 3.3 billion people at risk from the mosquito-borne disease, 2.5 billion live outside the African region.

Fatoumata Nafé Traoré, director of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, the global framework for coordinated action against the disease, called for that to change.

“Asia accounts for the second highest burden of malaria, second only to Africa,” she said.

“While the face of persistent economic uncertainty and profound changes in the landscape of global development aid, the region needs strong political leadership. “It also needs to develop financing strategies that include substantive and sustained domestic investment, traditional multilateral and bilateral aid and truly innovative sources of funding.”

She was speaking at the launch of Defeating Malaria in Asia, the Pacific, Americas, Middle East and Europe, a joint initiative with the World Health Organisation. The report said that the parasite threatens more than two billion people each year in the Asia-Pacific region, while smaller numbers are at risk in the Americas (100 million) and Middle East (250 million).

The report said that of 34 million cases of malaria outside Africa in 2010, which killed an estimated 46,000 people, the Asia-Pacific accounted for 88 percent, or 30 million, of these cases and 91pc, or 42,000, of the deaths.

India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea were hardest hit.

Outside Asia, there were 1.1 million cases in the Americas (1200 deaths and 2.9 million cases in the Middle East and the Caucasus with 3100 deaths.

The Sydney conference focused on growing resistance to the drug used everywhere to cure the life-threatening disease – artemisinin – which is central to the efficacy of anti-malarial treatment.

Resistance has been detected in Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam and the report said it stood to “unravel the hard-won gains of recent years”. – AFP
Films recount life of Baptist missionary

By Zon Pann Pwint

AMERICAN Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson will be honoured with the release next year of two locally produced films, both aimed at marking the 200th anniversary of Mr Judson’s arrival in Myanmar.

“Next year Baptist churches in Myanmar will celebrate the 200th anniversary of Adoniram Judson’s first arrival to Myanmar,” said Dr Tha Nyan, general secretary of the Young Men’s Christian Association and owner of Green Yellow Red film production company.

“No full-length documentary or historical film about him has ever made before, so we have decided to make a quality film to honour him in time for the celebration.”

Reverend U Kyi Soe Tun from U Naw Memorial Baptist Church in Yangon said Mr Judson first arrived in Myanmar on July 13, 1813. He is famed for writing and editing an English-Myanmar dictionary and for translating the full text of the Bible into Myanmar language, a version that is still in wide use today.

The Green Yellow Red production will be directed by U Tin Kha Soe Tun, Dr Tha Nyan and his wife, Myanmar Academy Award winning actress Daw Myint Myint Khine, will help with the filming.

The early part of Mr Judson’s life will be scripted by the US-based Christian organisation Vision Beyond Borders, while the part covering his life in Myanmar will be written by U Kyi Soe Tun.

“I will take the historical approach in making a film about Judson, and I want to show the special bond between him and the Myanmar people,” Dr Tha Nyan said.

He said the production company will cooperate with Vision Beyond Border in its search for an American actor to play the role of Mr Judson.

“We are looking for an American actor who has an interest in learning Myanmar language because Judson learned the language and continued speaking it afterwards. He even preached in Myanmar language in his native land after living here for 34 years,” Dr Tha Nyan said.

However, he said the production company will pay the money to hire a famous actor, so they are looking for a lesser-known actor within their budget.

“A famous make-up artist here will make him look like a foreign missionary,” said Dr Tha Nyan.

He added that the roles of U Naw, who was a first person to be baptised in Myanmar, and others will be played by local actors.

“The film will feature a turning point in Judson’s life, when he served as an interpreter in peace negotiations between the Burmese and British in 1826 to end the First Anglo-Burmese War, and the film will also show his missionary works in the harsh conditions in Myanmar,” he said.

Dr Tha Nyan said he expected the films to take nine months, and the movie will be shot on location in the United States, India and Myanmar.

U Naw Memorial Baptist Church is also in the process of making a video about Mr Judson, entitled Su Khat Tharaphu (Thorny Crown).

The video, which has been produced in production since February, is being directed by Thiri Han (Phoenix) and will be released on DVD in time for next year’s 200th anniversary celebration.

The role of Mr Judson is played by Phyo Ngwe Soe. The video covers Mr Judson’s missionary work in Myanmar, including how he spread the gospel, how he first baptised U Naw, U Thar Hla and U Pyar, and how he was supported by three women through many difficult times.

“Many people who are not Christians wrote books and poems in praise of Judson’s selfless works, including U Tin Nai Nai’s book Thamine Htiteka Soye Xudithawn (Judson in History),” Reverend U Eoe Tin said.

“It shows that he not only preached the Christian faith to others, but also engaged in social works that benefited the community at large, such as translating a dictionary from English language to Myanmar. He added: “His Bible translation is remarkably complete and so perfect that to this day no one has retranslated it.”

Baptist churches in Yangon will mark the 200th anniversary of Mr Judson’s arrival in Myanmar from July 11 to 14, 2013.

On July 13, the date of his arrival, a celebration will take place at View Point Hotel in Thaketa township, near the Yangon River, aimed at recreating the atmosphere during his landing on the spot 200 years ago.

Final judges named for movie awards

By Nyo Nyo Ei Htwe

JUDGES were chosen last month to make the final decision on the winners of the Myanmar Academy Awards for films released in 2011, which will be presented at a ceremony in Yangon on December 30.

The judges were chosen by the Myanmar Motion Picture Enterprise (MMPE), according to an announcement by the Ministry of Information published in the state-run press on October 23.

The judges are: U Tin Kha from the Myanmar Writers Association; Hon Thar Hla from the Myanmar Music Association; and U Kyi Soe Tun, U Min Naing, Daw Yin Yin Lai, U Sonny Tin, U Phoe Htaung, U He San Oo, U Aung Ko Latt and Daw Myint Myint Khine from the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation.

Choosing the winners will be the third and final stage of the selection process for the film awards.

During the first stage, a board of judges watched the films screened in Myanmar in 2011 and created a long-list of potential award winners. In the second stage a different group of judges viewed the long-listed films and from these made a short-list from which the third group will make the final decisions.

Daw Yin Yin Lai, a member of the third group who has worked as an actress, scriptwriter and film editor, said the judges will need to explain all their decisions in writing after they choose the winners.

She said she was proud to be named as a judge for the third stage.

“I’ve been interested in acting since childhood, so I won’t be bored being a judge on the Academy board,” she said.

Another judge, U Sonny Tin, said he was very surprised to be chosen as a first-time member for the third stage.

“I thought I wouldn’t be chosen for the judging board because I’m old and I’ve worked for many years as a judge, but I found out I had been chosen this year when they announced it in the newspaper,” said U Sonny Tin, who started working as an actor in 1951.

There won’t be any special preparation for judging celebration, but we will need to watch the films chosen by the previous two judges, make our decisions and write down the reasons for our choices,” he said.

He said the judges will spend about one month watching the films, making their decisions and writing their reasons.
S Korean culture wave ready to inundate Yangon

By Douglas Long

A WEEK of South Korean cultural events will be held in Yangon from November 8 to 14, including a film festival, taekwondo competition, street dance and K-pop dance final, according to a statement released last week by the South Korean embassy in Yangon.

Anchoring Korea Week 2012 will be the Korean Expo at the Myanmar Convention Centre from November 8 to 11, with exhibitions from 33 South Korean companies covering consumer and kitchen goods, cosmetics, foods, electronics, cars, construction equipment and more.

The seventh Korean Film Festival will be held at Thamada Cinema from November 9 to 12, under the theme “Exciting”. Films will include Highway, Bunt, Fly Penguin and Late Blossom, and fresh tickets can be purchased at the South Korean embassy from November 2 to 7.

On November 10, the Myanmar Convention Centre will host the Korea Day Dance Final and the Face of Myanmar Contest Semifinal, from 6pm to 8pm. The program will also include the K-pop Dance Final and the Face of Myanmar Contest Semifinal.

The grand prize for the speech contest is enrollment in the undergraduate or graduate scholarship program at Kangnam University.

More than 500 contestants from 20 teams will vie for prizes that include refrigerators, television sets and DVDs.

Roundout the excitement of Korea Week 2012 will be the always-thrilling Korean Speech Contest at Traders Hotel's My Marcom Ballroom on November 14, from 1:30pm to 5:30pm. Now in its 10th year, the contest will be held under the theme “Fusion”.

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Life's Good
How not to run the Yangon Marathon

By Douglas Long

“I’m no great authority on running marathons. I’ve done only five in my lifetime, in Los Angeles in 1997. I finished somewhere around the middle of the pack in a field of about 17,000 entrants.

Based on my limited experience and modest results, I would not presume to offer guidance to anyone else on how to finish well in a marathon.

But thinking back to 1997, I did learn some things that might help first-time marathoners, (including those mulling participation in this year’s Yangon International Marathon on January 27) avoid repeating my mistakes.

The accompanying graphics, which appeared in The Washington Post last month in the lead-up to the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington DC, offer additional advice from three running experts on how to tackle common marathon course characteristics in a scientific way.

Error 1: Training on flat roads.

It took me much longer to complete this marathon than I expected about 26 to 28 miles of time. You might want to try running the actual race course in training for variety and to give the legs and knees a bit of a break every now and then.

Error 2: Excessive training on dirt roads.

I did most of the last stages of the 2012 Olympic Trials Marathon. It was much more than walk. Then I spent the next 5 kilometres walking around runners who were much slower than I was. I didn’t feel about kilometre 10 that I was finally able to run at my pace. This won’t be an issue for the Yangon race.

Error 3: Starting too far back on race day.

I was finally able to run at the very back of the pack in Los Angeles. It wasn’t until about kilometre 10 that I was finally able to run at my pace. This won’t be an issue for the Yangon race.

Error 4: Stopping too long.

My advice: Integrate some hills into your training, including occasional runs on a stair-climbing machine during the early morning or late evening exhaust fumes and the heat got too overwhelming.

Myth 2: You have to be very fit to run a marathon.

For variety and to give the legs and knees a bit of a break every now and then.

Myth 3: Everyone hits the wall at Kilometre 30.

If runners believe this, it becomes self-fulfilling prophecy. It’s often good to have a short break, whether it’s consuming a carbohydrate bar or rehydrating with a sports-performance drink.

Myth 4: You have to be very fit to run a marathon.

We’ve known some runners who haven’t even been exercising, let alone running, and have been able to complete a race. This is clearly not advised – and if you ask one of them when they wake up the next day, they will tell you why.

Pro runners debunk three persistent myths about marathons

By Ryan Hall and Sara Hall

EVERY marathon course is challenging for a different reason: New York’s is known for the bridges that connect the city’s five boroughs. Boston’s is famous for its tough hills. And October’s Marine Corps Marathon in Washington DC is notorious for its uphill finish. As professional runners, we’ve learned a lot about how best to train for marathons, which runs them, why they’re so popular – and which myths deserve debunking.

Myth 1: Runners should “carbo-load” by eating pasta the night before the race.

As much as runners enjoy any opportunity to binge on food guilt-free, the best way to “carbo-load” is to eat just 100 extra grams of carbohydrates, the equivalent of three bagels, spaced out throughout the day before the race.

Your muscles can store only a certain amount of carbohydrate at one time for race day. Anything beyond that is stored as fat, which no runner wants weighing him down.

In Sara’s early running days, she once ate six bowls of oatmeal before a race in an attempt to carry over a carbohydrate load. After a massive stomach cramp hindered her performance, she realised that a last-minute carbohydrate dash was not effective.

So instead of piling on the pasta the night before, it’s better to go on snacking with extra carbohydrates between meals. And taking in protein is the diversity of the runners.

Watch a marathon from the sidelines and you’ll see that for most runners, becoming physically fit is still a work in progress. The race is often a milestone in that process.

Some of the marathoners who have inspired us most are those who, since they are not yet fit enough to run the race, walk the entire thing. We see them walking the final miles, determined to finish, while the course is being dismantled around them.”

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Main Tips

The rice should be dry when combined with the liquid and mushroom mixture. Otherwise it will turn out mushy.

Instead of spinach you can use morning glory (ka zun yet).

Drizzle the salad with sesame oil, if you prefer.

QUAFFING QUOTE

"The thing I absolutely love about food is it's a common thread that connects us so matter what cultures we come from." — Poh Ling Yeow (Malaysian-born Australian artist, actress, celebrity chef and runner-up on MasterChef Australia)

NEXT WEEK

Last week I introduced New Orleans style rice salad and pan-fried turmeric chicken.

RICE. Very simple, yet there are so many ways to cook it for so many flavours. The variations take the boredom out of eating plain steamed rice all the time.

Luckily for me, my Aussie husband is an enthusiastic consumer of food, which gives me all the excuse I need to experiment with mixing flavours from different culture and regions. We always have fun with these experiments.

This week I explain how to prepare Japanese mushroom rice using a rice cooker. How easy it is!

This is a very popular traditional Japanese rice dish, which can be cooked with dashi (cooking stock) and different types of mushrooms. I use dried shiitake mushroom slices, which are available at the local markets. The strong flavours and smell of the mushroom combine perfectly with the rice, making for a delicious meal.

In the past I made this rice by soaking the mushrooms in water for at least 3 hours. However, I figured out an amazingly easy way to make my own dashi. I also substitute Shan rice for sushi rice because it’s cheaper and easier to find in Yangon. Shan rice is also sticky, so it combines perfectly with all the flavours and the mushroom.

This rice dish goes very well with greens, so I have also included a recipe for spinach salad with sesame dressing. Enjoy!

Japanese mushroom rice

INGREDIENTS

- 6 tablespoons Kikomon Japanese sweet rice wine
- 2 cups of Shan rice
- 2½ cups.

PREPARATION

1. Wash the shiitake mushrooms.
2. Then cut their stems off, and gently squeeze them and cook for 3-4 minutes. We need 4 tablespoons of Kikomon rice wine vinegar available at City Mart, and soy sauce for this dish.
3. Slice the shiitake mushrooms and drain well.
4. Wash and slice the oyster mushrooms thinly and drain well too.
5. Mix the Mirin soy sauce, sesame oil and shiitake mushrooms in a saucepan and cook for 3 minutes. Add the oyster mushrooms into the saucepan and cook for another 5 minutes until most of the liquid is absorbed.
6. Mix the shiitake mushroom water, rice and mushroom mixture well, place in the rice cooker and cook. When the rice is finished cooking, add the roasted sesame seeds and mix well.

Spinach salad

INGREDIENTS

- 3 bunches of spinach
- 4 cloves of garlic (sliced)
- 1 teaspoon of Mirin
- 3 tablespoons of Kikomon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon of brown sugar or caster sugar

PREPARATION

1. Wash the leaves and young stalks (crisp and easy to break). Blanch them in lightly salted boiling water for 3-4 minutes. We need 2½ cups of fresh shiitake mushrooms or 200g of dried shiitake mushrooms.
2. Mix the Mirin soy sauce, sesame oil and shiitake mushrooms in a saucepan and cook for 3 minutes. Add the oyster mushrooms into the saucepan and cook for another 5 minutes until most of the liquid is absorbed.

The highlight was probably the fried wines. However, everything was reasonably priced, in the K2000 to K5000 range. The beer was refreshingly cold and the service competent enough, although the waiters were quite helpful when asked to recommend something and then forget to bring our drinks.

But whereas in Nay Pyi Taw proper you struggle to find either food or atmosphere, Uncle Chan can tick at least one of those boxes. It is barbecue-beer hall in style but you can sit outside beside Yaza Harni road, savouring the warm upper Myanmar night and gazing up at Upataansi Pagod which towers over Pyimana as Shwedagon does Yangon (funny that). Uncle Chan is not without its faults. However, everything is relative and, in the capital at least, you can certainly do worse.

——— RR
THE end of the Buddhist Lent period is here, which means Thadingyut Festival of Lights, which means oodles of fantabulous sales promotions! But Socialite started her week on October 25 with an event of a different sort, with fantabulastic cross-dressing performers from Thailand taking the stage at the Myanmar Convention Centre. On the same day she also attended the somewhat tamer opening of Colourful Myanmar Handicrafts Shop at Bogyoke Market. On October 26 she went to the Fuji Graphic products presentation at Central Hotel, but the fun really started the next day at the fantabumagorical Thadingyut sale at Kandawgyi Park, including the promotion at the Korean Beauty shop. And then it finally arrived!!! October 28 was the Big Day that Socialite had marked on her calendar months in advance: the opening of YGN mobile phone shop in Latha township!!! After that she found time to drop by the wedding reception for her friends Ko Ko Thein and Han Oo Khin at Sedona Hotel, and of course we can’t forget the Singapore Airline dinner at Parkroyal Hotel.
Finding bits of Myanmar while on a visit to India

By Msw Maw San

HAVE you ever stood in immigration, handed over your passport, and been asked if you have filled in the application form? What do you do when the immigration officer is very hands-on and wants you to fill the form in before you hand your passport over? Some passengers might hand over their passport before filling the form in. I have done it many times. You have the assurance that your passport is there if you hand it over, but you also risk missing the flight if you hand it over. Should you fill it in yourself? I have done it before, and to the officer's surprise, I filled in the form in the ugliest handwriting, but he did not care. He stamped my passport and let me go. I am glad to say that I have never missed a flight because of this issue.

The reason I mention this is because I am sharing my experience of being stopped at immigration while on a visit to India. I was on a flight from Yangon to Delhi, and I had been to Delhi before. I was not familiar with the process of immigration, and I was not aware that I needed to fill in the form before I handed my passport over.

When I reached the immigration counter, the officer told me to fill in the form. I tried to fill it in, but I was not sure if I had filled it in correctly. The officer then told me to fill in the form again, and I did so. I was not sure if I had filled it in correctly again, but the officer told me that I had filled it in correctly.

The officer then told me to hand over my passport. I did so, and he stamped my passport and let me go. I was relieved, and I realized that I had filled in the form correctly.

I want to share this experience because I realize that people might make mistakes while filling in the form, and they might not be aware of the process. I hope that this experience will help others to be prepared and avoid making mistakes while filling in the form.

Domestic Airlines

Air Bagan Ltd [W9]
57, Shwe Thar Yoe Road, Bahan Township, Yangon
Tel: 02-4823411, 4823412, Fax: 02-4823413

Air KBZ (K7)
46, Bahan Thar Yoe Road, Bahan Township, Yangon
Tel: 02-6322230, Fax: 02-6322229

Yangon Airways (YH)
66, MMF Tower, Level 5, Upper Pyay Road, Bahan Township, Yangon
Tel: 09-985650, Fax: 09-985651

Domestic Airlines

Air Mandalay [G7]
8, Bahan Thar Yoe Road, Bahan Township, Yangon
Tel: 02-6322230, Fax: 02-6322229

TRAVEL

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Pythons and floating homes in Cambodia

By Aung Si Hein

TRAVELLING through Southeast Asia by boat is a thrilling experience that freshens the mind between the hot and humid climate and destroys misconceptions about different parts of the region. I recently had the chance to take such a journey with the China-ASEAN Expo Touring Assembly, which takes delegates through the region every year in support of the China-ASEAN Expo. One member of the tour group, Dr. Ling Tung King, echoed my thoughts when he said that “everywhere cities have the same features, with high buildings, flyovers and colourful lights at night”. But the countryside throughout Southeast Asia is much more diverse and appealing, he said, adding that we were lucky that places like Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia were on our travel itinerary.

“Tonle Sap Lake is a real place where we can see how the local people live,” he said.

The pythons really piqued my interest, and I was looking forward to visiting them. The site was far removed from the dense forests the group explored major urban centres such as Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, but I was less interested in seeing market scenes around the country, in observing life in the countryside.

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Revisiting ‘Robocop’, a film ahead of its time

By Dana Stevens

NEW YORK — Robocop, Dutch director Paul Verhoeven’s breakthrough film in the United States, is an inventive, low-budget sci-fi thriller, was a sleeper box-office hit in the UK, built on the late 1980s — the summer between my junior and senior years of high school — which I spent working at a bakery in the small, movie-theatre-less town my parents had just moved to. I had seen portions of the film from that time, but I imagine it struck me as a cheap Terminator knockoff (a conclusion that would have been easy to draw from the trailer, which straight-up lifted the theme music from James Cameron’s 1984 film). Not unlike the murder-cop-turned-law-enforcing-cyborg, Robocop, has enjoyed a surprisingly robust afterlife. In the years since it was one of the best films of the year, critics and scholars of culture zealously hatched a new theory: It’s remembered and beloved because of its cerebral, technological (It still plays like a device for big action blockbustersto include some gesture toward political or social allegory, often taking place in vague yet specific locales, and fully imagined, deeply depressing political dystopia that we soon realize with horror is pretty much where we already live in 2012 perhaps even more than in 1987). You owe you give three minutes, and we’ll give you the world! burble the TV news personalities whose broadcast opens the film, with worker reactions about horrifying news items from around the globe alternating with ads for a family board game called “Nukem” (the whole movie is studded with sharp, funny TV ads, many inserted by Verhoeven later in an attempt to lighten up the ratings board, who initially insisted this film be rated X for its graphic violence.) The story takes place in a future Detroit (soon to be forcibly renamed “Gedeta City”) by developers, where police corruption, industrial decline, corporate greed and consumerist obsession have combined to create a chillingly familiar helioscape. In the commentary track to the Criterion release of Robocop (a general note: There is no such thing as a Paul Verhoeven commentary track that is not worth listening to), the voluble Dutchman kicks off with the story of how he at first resisted when offered the chance to make Robocop. He had a reputation in Holland as an up-and-coming filmmaker and didn’t want to sully it by churning out a piece of standard action-sci-fi schlock. It wasn’t until his wife pointed out that the story of a robot cop struggling to recover his own lost humanity to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein that Verhoeven began to warm to the script. It was a brilliant stroke to cast Joel Kinnaman in the title role. I don’t envy them for taking on the role. Weller’s air of almost freakishly true. Robocop is set for a remake in 2014, with Joe Padilha directing and Joel Kimmelin in the titular role. It will be interesting to see if the challenge of remaking a movie that was already so ahead of its time — Despite
**Employment**

**Local Position**

**GENDER EQUALITY Training and Research and Development (Yangon)**

A relevant educational background is preferred, but 3 years experience in marketing and sales is also considered. Experience in the tourism industry is beneficial, as is knowledge of basic computer skills.

**Experience**

- Excellent written and English language skills.
- Good interpersonal communication skills.
- Ability to work as a team.
- Ability to write technical reports.

**Responsibilities**

- Implement sales and marketing strategies.
- Develop and manage sales records.
- Manage customer complaints and feedback.

**Requirements**

- Minimum 5 years of experience in the tourism industry.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Ability to work under pressure.
- Ability to use Microsoft Office applications.

**Salary**

- Competitive salary.
- Benefits package.

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**BLuE		BIRD**

**Office 2 Nos, Graduated**

- Educational background and experience in management and sales.
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**Employment**

**Personal Position**

**Malaysia**

- A company is looking for a housekeeper. Experience in managing and providing maintenance work is required. The company is based in Perak, Malaysia.

**Responsibilities**

- Managing maintenance work.
- Providing customer service.

**Requirements**

- Minimum 5 years of experience.
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MOSCOW – A huge influx of foreign footballing and managerial talent into Russian football in recent years has boosted the standing of the domestic league but also raised fears about a drought of home-grown players.

In the USSR, football existed exclusively on players trained under the rigorous Soviet system but since the 1990s a steady drip of foreign footballers into post-Soviet Russia has turned into a flood.

Now fans can enjoy watching stars such as Anzhi Makhachkala’s Cameroon forward Samuel Eto’o during their UEFA Europa League football match at Anfield on October 25. Pic: AFP

“With the financial growth of Russian football clubs – owned by billionaires and driven on by a passionate desire to breathe new life into the country, we need to know that they fit the demands of modern football better that the previous rule of 16, which was introduced in 2005,” said Fabio Capello. “It’s not enough players know the current quota, saying it gives him too much, but how you end.”

Capello has also raised fears about the current quota, saying it gives him too much, but how you end.

“Russia granted citizenship to former South Korea Olympic champion Ahn Hyun-Soo to represent the country at the Sochi 2014 Games in short track speed-skating as a key player in the Russian women’s basketball team is the US-born star Becky Hammon,” said the Sport Express.

“The main goal of the RFU is to prepare the new players for the national squad in the under-18, under-21 and the Russian B team. So far, no foreign footballer has ever been awarded a Russian passport to represent the country. But there are precedents in other sports. CISKA Moscow’s Alan Dragoev and Anzhi Makhachkala’s Cameroon forward Samuel Eto’o have also been Russian national team players.”

The dearth of young talent, however, casts a shadow over the prospects of Russia’s national side, who failed to qualify for the 2006 and 2010 World Cups and crashed out in the 1994 quarter-finals. But there is no point inviting foreign stars to Russia if they are going to disappear in the crowd of mediocre footballers who remain Russia’s football, “a one time axe to catch up only due to the limit.”

“By naturalising foreign talent, however, casts a shadow over the prospects of Russia’s national side, who failed to qualify for the 2006 and 2010 World Cups and crashed out in the 1994 quarter-finals.”

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Another huge issue is for home-grown players are allowed to take to the field at any one time in international league matches to ensure home talent has a chance to develop.

Currently a maximum of seven foreign players are allowed to take to the field at any one time and that number has been limited a pool of players to 25 back the project.

This is only the start of a long-term initiative that will leave an incredible economic legacy for Spain. “The Games will attract investors, boost investment, create wealth and promote tourism.”

Blanco, who is due to leave the club a month after the Rio de Janeiro Games as a vital opportunity to create wealth and promote tourism.”

Blanco, who is due to leave the club a month after the Rio de Janeiro Games, said Blanco.

“Madrid has the financial power to host the Games it was actually a very good reason to give Spain the Games for the second time in their history – Barcelona having hosted them successfully in 1992.”

“Spain and creating jobs and wealth to get the economy going again,” said Blanco.

“You also have to remember that the global economy has been so unstable that it’s only now that we can see exactly where we are. But what’s going to happen in 2020?”

Blanco, a former judoka who was also president of the Spanish Judo federation, drew a comparison with some host cities whose economies were stronger than Madrid’s at the time they won the Games but who since have suffered serious economic hardship.

“Some host cities were in a totally different economic situations but not the city, and we need awarded the Games to the time they actually delivered them,” he said.

“To my mind, it’s not how you start that matters so much, but how you end.”

“And the fact that Madrid already has about 80 percent of the necessary infrastructure in place – including the airport, ring roads and underground – is a solid guarantee of stability.”

“Our investments will be reduced to the minimum. We also have the full support of the Spanish, regional and local governments and will travel the whole way with them hand in hand.”

Blanco, whose Madrid bid is competing against Istanbul and Tokyo – the only one of the cities with to have previously hosted the Games – said that a Madrid win would be a win that “fits the demands of modern football better that the previous rule of 16, which was introduced in 2005.”

“Spain needs the Games more than ever,” he said.

““Private enterprise is committed to the bid and sees it as a unique opportunity to breathe new life into the economy.”

“Whatever City Games attract investors, boost investment, create wealth and promote tourism.”

Blanco, who is due to leave for a series of engagements over the next couple of months as he tries to sell his message to some of the 100-guest International Olympic Committee (IOC) members who will vote on the host city in Buenos Aires on September 7 next year, said the London Games proved his point about the economic benefits.

“The project does not come to an end in 2020.”

“We have to look on it as a long-term initiative that will leave an incredible economic legacy for Spain.”

“We only have to look at the UK, which came out of recession in the third quarter on the back of the Games. This is only the start of a long journey.”

Blanco, who says he is driven by a passionate belief that in winning they can build a new society, said victory would also give some much-needed hope to a youth which is suffering from an unemployment rate of 52.34 percent.

“Our people are the future that we need to take care of our economy,” said Blanco.

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Tokyo marathon upgraded

TOKYO – The Tokyo marathon will be upgraded next year to sit alongside Boston, London, Berlin, Chicago and New York as one of the world’s major races, its organisers said on November 2.

The Tokyo marathon in its current form has been staged in February every year since 2007, contested by the world’s leading runners as well as more than 30,000 mostly amateurs.

In 2013, the event will become the sixth race of the World Marathon Majors, a Grand Prix-style series for marathon runners, the Tokyo Marathon Foundation said.

Tokyo will kick off the 2013 series on February 24, followed by Boston and London in April, Berlin in September, Chicago in October and New York in November.

The men’s race in the 2012 Tokyo marathon was won by Kenya’s Michael Kipyego and the women’s by Atsede Habtamu of Ethiopia. – AFP

Aussies use asylum-seeker to boost spin

SYDNEY – Australia has an unlikely weapon as it prepares to stave off a red-hot South African bowling attack – a Pakistan asylum-seeker who will be helping batsmen ready on my bowling”,

Ahmed will be in Brisbane as a net bowler ahead of the Test starting on November 9, even though there is no guarantee South Africa – with its powerful pace line-up – will use Tahir at the Gabba.

But Australian opener Ed Cowan, who pushed for Ahmed to be a net bowler, said it made sense to practise against him ahead of the contest against the world’s number one Test side.

“If you’re looking to prepare for someone who would have been hard to replicate, you may as well get someone who, to the naked eye, seems pretty similar,” Cowan told the Sydney Morning Herald.

Ahmed is familiar with similarities in his bowling and I am like him, so it’s we can both bowl a good wrong ‘un,” he said.

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