



The gutted remains of the Air Bagan Fokker-100 after it crashed near Heho Airport on December 25, killing two people, including a tour guide aboard the plane and a motorcyclist. Pic: AFP/www.myanmar.net.mm

Christmas Day tragedy

A tour guide and a man riding a motorcycle are killed when an Air Bagan Fokker-100 crashes while landing near Heho Airport

By Zaw Win Than

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

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

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

Witnesses said the plane hit powerlines about 1.6 kilometres (one mile) from the runway and then crashed into trees. They said there was heavy fog at the time.

The plane caught fire moments after it came to a halt, witnesses said.

Among the survivors was Ms Sabine Hawpel, a journalist from Germany, who said the landing approach initially appeared to smooth.

"Then we realised something is getting wrong and people started to shout and cry and panic," Ms Hawpel told *The Myanmar Times*.

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

Ms Hawpel said most of those who sustained injuries were at the

back of the plane. Those who escaped the plane included a man who had suffered burns to his entire body, who was "just lying in the field," she said.

"There was complete confusion, they started to collect us to make

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

She said the survivors were taken to hall in a village. "Nobody knew what to do and some officials

came, police and politicians; there was complete confusion," said Ms Hawpel who was visiting Myanmar for the first time in 25 years.

"I know your country and I love your country, but this was bad luck on one side and on the other hand we were lucky because the whole plane could have exploded

and we might not be here now," Ms Hawpel said.

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

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

"But the plane turned wrong," he said.

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

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An open letter to President Obama

By Tha Tun Khine

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

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

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

The ethnic people of Rakhine State include the Maramagyi, Kaman, Mro, Thet, Chin and Rakhine – not those Bengalis whom you refer to as Rohingyas. Rakhine people never think of those Bengalis as their ethnic brethren and neither does the Myanmar government. You must have known that President U Thein Sein has, soon after the conflict began in Rakhine State between the Bengalis and Rakhine, declared that there are no Rohingyas in our country. And you must know, Mr President, that Rakhine are not the same as the Bamar (Burmese), who live in Myanmar proper. Rakhine are a different

ethnic minority who live in Rakhine State. The mentality, history and culture of the Rakhine people is different from the Bamar.

Rakhine attitudes towards Bengalis who live in Rakhine State are also not the same: they have close but not friendly contact with them, and sometimes enmity, as we saw recently. Rakhine consider those Bengalis as encroachers on their land, a conspicuous reality that no one can deny and a fact that the British know very well because Rakhine is the land they annexed first before they occupied the whole of Myanmar.

The British invited those Bengalis from the then state of Bengal (now Bangladesh) in India to work as farm labourers in Rakhine State. The majority of the Bengalis now in Rakhine State are considered illegal immigrants. If you are considerate and sympathetic enough, you can understand our situation very well as you also have a problem with immigrants from Mexico. Can you accept all those illegal immigrants from Mexico (and from other places) as your citizens on humanitarian grounds alone?

I do not mean that those Bengalis should not have human rights. Like Mexican illegal immigrants, the



in Rakhine State; there are more than 300 mosques in the small township of Maungdaw alone. There are also many mosques and Muslims all over Myanmar. We have Muslim teachers and friends whom we love and respect.

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

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

The origin of the Bengalis in Rakhine State

Who can guarantee they won't do that?

Anyway, let's face the reality. Bengalis are living in Rakhine State. There are also ethnic Rakhine. They are now agitated and finding it hard to live together. Rakhine people don't want to live together with them now.

Rakhine are the host. Bengalis are the guest, albeit uninvited. Please don't forget this fact, Mr President. Guests must respect their

a savage conflict is difficult for all people involved.

When a guest cannot live on good terms with the host he must leave. Where do they have to go? No place to go? No. There are many places for them to go. There are many Muslim countries that show their concern about them and there are many other countries and people that sympathise with them and support them and their "cause". They should stop giving lip service to the "cause" of the Bengalis of Rakhine State and give them places in their homeland. If they share, the number they will each have to accept won't be much.

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

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

(The author is a Rakhine national living in Yangon.)

'When a guest cannot live on good terms with the host he must leave.'

Bengalis of Rakhine State should also have human rights – they are human, after all. But there is rule of law in your country and in our country as well. We cannot ignore this. We have a citizenship law and whether people are citizens or not should be decided according to this law.

We Rakhine have never maltreated those Bengalis living in Rakhine State and there never was and never is discrimination against them on any grounds, be it religion or colour or race or something else. Their mosques are everywhere

Encroachment on their land by the Bengalis through force of numbers is the issue that worries Rakhine people most. Rakhine are losing their land to the Bengalis who come from Bangladesh, where the population is more than 100 million. The population of Rakhine in Rakhine State is less than two million. Mr President, the Rakhine are just a minority ethnic group, simple and poor. We are in danger of drowning under the huge wave of Bengali intruders.

According to the British census of 1891 there were only 58,255 Muslims in

is Bangladesh. It is an undeniable fact confirmed by their features, language, complexion, dress, culture and religion. Rohingyas is the name given to them not long ago by some unscrupulous Bengalis on the advice of some extremists and terrorists with the aim of claiming undeserved rights. They even claim an autonomous state of Rohingyas. What if the illegal immigrants of Mexico asked for citizenship and a federal state? Now they claim an "autonomous" state. How about in 40 or 50 years? They could even call for an independent state.

host. This is universally accepted. How did this conflict start? Because of the breach of this custom by the guest, Mr President: a very ugly and cruel act committed by Bengalis against an innocent Rakhine girl.

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

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Tachileik land grab has links to president

By Noe Noe Aung

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

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

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

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

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

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

U Chit Win said U Ko Oo and U Ar Hee, who was also a member of the *pyithu sit*, applied for and were given permission to cultivate 25 acres and 300 acres respectively on the land in 1999. Permission was granted when President U Thein Sein served as commander of Triangle Region Command, U Chit Win said.

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

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

and a road on the land, ignoring the objections of villagers and township authorities," he said.

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

U Zaw Htay, a director in the President's Office, declined to comment on the dispute.

But Lawyer U Hla Myint told *The Myanmar Times* that if the Lwelsatone villagers' version of events is correct, U Ko Oo will have trouble retaining

ownership of the land.

"Under the law, if the [State Peace and Development Council] divided and sold the land to villagers on the instruction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the ownership of former owners is automatically rescinded," he said.



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

After decades muzzling media, Myanmar to allow private dailies

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

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

"We can say it is the beginning of the third and final stage of the media reforms in the country," a senior Ministry of Information official told Reuters, asking not to be named.

"We will accept applications in February and I expect there will be about a dozen applicants."

The decision comes as part of an astonishing relaxation

of laws governing the media in Myanmar, among the most dramatic reforms introduced by Thein Sein's quasi-civilian government since it came to power 19 months ago.

The regime it replaced demanded every song, book, cartoon, news report and planned artwork be approved by teams of paranoid censors rooting out hidden political messages and criticisms of the junta.

"We do welcome this news," said Wai Phyo, chief editor of the *Weekly Eleven* journal, one of four publications owned by the Eleven Media Group. "We've been waiting for it for some time."

The relaxation of controls started in June last year, when the Ministry of Information allowed about half of Myanmar's privately run weekly journals and monthly magazines to publish without submitting page proofs to censors in advance.

Four months ago, the ministry scrapped all

censorship and started giving a makeover to the state dailies, which routinely chided Daw Aung San Suu Kyi while praising generals who kept Myanmar in dire poverty and fear for decades.

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

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

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

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

By Kyaw Hsu Mon

DAW Phyu Phyu Thin was one of 43 members of the National League for Democracy elected in the April 1, 2012, by-election to serve in parliament. She now represents Yangon's Mingalar Taung Nyunt township in the Pyithu Hluttaw. *The Myanmar Times* spoke with her on December 19 about her experiences during her first six months in Nay Pyi Taw.

What were your experiences serving as a member of parliament (MP) this year?

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

I have heard that MPs talk to the voters about what they have heard and what is happening in the hluttaw after each session, but can you say that the MPs really listen to the concerns of the people and take them to the hluttaw?

MPs have great responsibilities from voters not only from their own constituencies but also from other areas. Now we have a lot of conflict around the country, which is why all the NLD MPs have a meeting with Daw



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

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

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

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

They will be related to legal affairs and transportation issues. But we will also be busy with budget issues in the next session because it is the budget season.

What are the weaknesses and strengths of being an MP?

For many years we were living under a dictatorship, so we were very far away from hluttaw politics. But I have noticed that even during this time of first steps towards democracy, the hluttaw sessions are becoming more and more active. This year we have been able to debate issues such as the farm land law and education reform, so we have been able to work for the people. By getting involved in the hluttaw, I feel that I am able to tell others what the people want. On the other hand, the sessions are very long and we MPs have a lot of things to do outside the hluttaw, so sometimes it's hard to be patient. But the next session will be short and we will be able to get to the point of the discussions more quickly because the ministries and the MPs now work in better harmony with one another.

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

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

From page 1

Tragedy

Air Bagan said the airline was fully insured for all aspects related to the accident.

Air Bagan managing director U Thet Htoo Htwe told a news conference at Yangon's Kandawgyi Palace Hotel on December 26 that the aircraft was airworthy and had been maintained in accordance with the approved schedules of the manufacturer, by qualified aircraft engineers.

U Thet Htoo Htwe said both pilots were fully qualified and were sent regularly for simulator training and their licences and proficiency checks were current.

"Our pilots always follow standard operating procedures," he said.

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

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

The director of Air Bagan's engineering department, U Hlaing Bwar, said the cause of the crash would be announced after the flight recorder was analysed.

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



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

Air Bagan said it acquired the Fokker-100, which had been in operation since 1991, from British Midlands International Company in August 2005.

Air Bagan was formed in June 2004 and launched operations in November that year.

Air Bagan is a subsidiary of Htoo Trading Company,

a conglomerate owned by U Tay Za, who is blacklisted by the United States because of his alleged links to the former military government.



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NGOs step up fight against trafficking

Partnerships between local and international groups help to stop human trafficking in war-torn Kachin State

By Bill O'Toole

DOMESTIC and international aid groups have formed partnerships to combat human trafficking in 18 camps for internally displaced persons in Kachin State near the border with China.

China is a major destination country for human trafficking from Myanmar and those displaced by conflict are particularly vulnerable because of the difficult conditions in the camps.

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

But the conflict has complicated efforts to combat human trafficking in the region. Many displaced persons – about 39,000

out of 90,000, according to the United Nations – are living in camps in areas controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisation, and the government has for the most part denied the UN and other INGOs direct access to these areas because of security concerns.

In her recent visit to Myanmar, the UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, Valerie Amos, urged President U Thein Sein to reconsider this policy.

"We have substantial experience working in insecure environments... we hope that the government will give us permission to travel to these areas and provide the aid that is so desperately needed," she said at a press conference in Yangon on December 7.

Despite not having direct access to the relief camps, the UN Inter-Project to Combat Human Trafficking (UNIAP) has been able to contribute to anti-trafficking efforts behind KIA lines by partnering with Kachin relief groups.

"The strength is with the organisations already in

Kachin State ... they contact us and we can provide them with training materials. We even have training materials in Kachin language," said project coordinator Daw Ohnmar Ei Ei Chaw.

She said that much of her agency's materials are aimed at simply improving awareness of human trafficking in the camps.

"The root cause [of trafficking] is lack of education," said Ms Nang Pu, secretary of the Kindness Women's Group, which recently developed its own anti-trafficking education literature based on UNIAP material. "In the camps most women don't understand [what] trafficking [is] or aren't even aware of it."

The Kindness Women's Group used its new materials at a seminar in the KIO-controlled town of Maija Yang on December 14. "We will do three days of training," Ms Nang Pu said ahead of the seminar. "The participants are all women and women leaders from each of the local camps; there will be 30 participants."



Members of Kindness Women's Group conduct a human trafficking awareness program in Kachin State. Pic: Supplied

In addition to materials from UNIAP, the Kindness Women's group has received funding from the US embassy in Yangon

that has allowed it to cover the cost of transport and lodging for the seminar's participants. The funding came from a small grants program that provides up to US\$100,000 for projects that promote women's rights in "underprivileged or conflict afflicted areas".

These 30 women are expected to return to their respective camps and educate women and girls on common tactics used by human traffickers, which include luring women into China with the promise of marriage or a lucrative job.

Daw Ohnmar Ei Ei Chaw and others acknowledged that with conditions so poor in the camps, there is little they can do to stop women from looking across the border for ways to support their families. "When people do not have food to eat they will do whatever they can," said Ms May Sabe Tu.

With this in mind, the UNIAP always makes sure training materials contain

the number for its anti-trafficking hotline, which provides access to local and national law enforcement in China and Myanmar. "We always include information for potential migrant workers," said Daw Ohnmar Ei Ei Chaw. "When you can't stop them from moving, you give them numbers they can call" in case they become victims of exploitation.

Mr Craig Haltmeier, the head of the small grants program at the US embassy, said he was not concerned that the embassy does not have direct access to some projects.

"In many respects the people that are most savvy are the grants recipients themselves. In the last six years the small grants program has evolved not based on what the US government has pushed onto people but what people have requested from us," he said. "[Kindness and other groups] are on the ground, they know what is possible."

Ministry to care for athletes during games

By Yamon Phu Thit

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

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

Members of the Orthopaedics Society, which is under the MMA, and specialists from Good Shepherds will be on standby at venues in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, Mandalay and

Ngwe Saung Beach during the games to provide care.

"We will allocate mobile teams to different venues at the competitions," Dr Myint Thaung said.

"We will refer athletes who sustain severe injuries to Yangon General Hospital and North Okkalapa General Hospital, where our members will be able to provide operations," he said.

Seoul-based Good Shepherd will provide equipment to the hospitals for the orthopaedic operations. Good Shepherd Hospital specialises in sports medicine, surgery and rehabilitation.

Because sports medicine is a relatively new field in Myanmar, Good Shepherd will provide monthly training to Myanmar specialists before the games begin on December 11, 2013.

"The medical universities in Myanmar do not teach sports medicine. It is not popular in Myanmar. But it is

very important to teach this subject, especially when the sports sector is booming," Dr Myint Thaung said.

"We are not only focusing on the SEA Games. We are aiming to improve sports medicine and sports surgery in Myanmar, using the games as a starting point."

Myanmar will host the SEA Games for the third time next year and the games will include up to 28 sports, according to the Ministry of Sports.

Athletes who participate in contact sports and sports that require physical strength are more prone to injury. Sports such as football, hockey and weightlifting can lead to knee injuries, sprains, strains, fractures and dislocations, Dr Myint Thaung said.

Myanmar has about 280 orthopaedic specialists but more modern equipment and training is needed to develop orthopaedic care, the society says.

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- ▶ Be confident and creative
- ▶ Have the capacity to work under pressure and meet deadlines

Applicants should send a two page curriculum vitae with a covering letter explaining why he/she is the most suitable candidate for the role. The deadline for applications is 31 January 2013.



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Translator/Sub-editor

The translator/sub-editor will work on The Myanmar Times features supplement desk and will be responsible for translating reporters' copy from Myanmar language to English. Sub-editing English articles will also be required. The successful candidate will report to the Features Supplement Editor.

The translator/sub-editor must:

- ▶ Be a Myanmar national
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- ▶ Have a bachelor's degree
- ▶ Have a strong interest in news and current affairs
- ▶ Have the capacity to work under pressure and meet deadlines

Applicants should send a two page curriculum vitae with a covering letter explaining why he/she is the most suitable candidate for the role. The deadline for applications is 31 January 2013.



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Government ‘ready to listen’ to KIO

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

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

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

A KIO official confirmed that they received a written request from the government but declined to elaborate further, Chiang Mai-based news group *The Irrawaddy* reported on December 20.

A government peace negotiation team and representatives from the KIO met at the Sino-Burmese border town of Ruili on October 30, where U Aung Min promised a political dialogue in the near future. Although the

government has indicated a preference for Bhamo or Muse as the location for negotiations, they said the KIO can choose.

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

James Lun Dau, deputy chief of foreign affairs for the KIO, has doubts that the new peace talks offered by the government would help put an end to the year-and-a-half-long conflict, as previous dialogues have not yielded any lasting agreements, *The Irrawaddy* reported him as saying on December 20.

U Aung Min said that he is pleased with the government’s

reconciliation measures with armed ethnic groups in 2012, and anticipates positive results in 2013.

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

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

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

The KIA was founded in 1961 as a government opposition group. They signed a cease-fire agreement in 1994 under the



Armed militants in southern Kachin State form a people’s militia group earlier this year. Pic: Supplied

military government, but the agreement was reneged in June 2011. Since then, thousands of skirmishes

have erupted between the Tatmadaw and the KIA. The KIA has not signed any agreements with the

new government, and heavy fighting has accelerated between the two sides since June 2011.

MRCS to build shelters for displaced in Rakhine State

By Aye Sapay Phyu

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

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

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

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

According to a report released in early December by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs, more than 115,000 people have been displaced by the recent inter-communal violence in Rakhine State, and are in need of assistance.

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

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



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IFC’s engagement in Myanmar focuses on promoting inclusive growth through investment and advisory engagements that: i) improve the investment climate to enable the broader population to participate in and benefit from Myanmar’s economic reform program and support investment likely to create job opportunities for the population; ii) increase access to finance for micro, small and medium enterprises by supporting the establishment of commercial microfinance and to support the banking sector to increase lending to SMEs; and iii) to support the development of infrastructure to reduce key impediments to commerce and reduce operating costs.

Our operations in Myanmar will grow in 2013, and we are looking for qualified applicants for the following five positions. Successful candidates will be expected to contribute to the development of IFC’s Myanmar Program by developing excellent client relations, designing and implementing projects for meaningful development impact, and ensuring IFC procedures are respected. In addition, successful applicants are expected to actively identify new opportunities for IFC, provide input to IFC’s strategy and build relationships with industry stakeholders.

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Please review the complete job description and selection criteria at <http://www.ifc.org/careers> and choose the vacancy number 123013.

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Interested candidates should apply on-line at <http://www.ifc.org/careers> and choose the relevant vacancy number. Please note that you need to register before submitting your application. The closing date is 13th January 2013. Only applicants selected for interview will be contacted.



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Singapore: shopping, eating and...?

IN DEPTH

with
Roger Milton



On December 21, the world did not end as an ancient Mayan calendar had forecast – but it seems most Singaporeans would not have minded much if it had.

Last week, a worldwide Gallup survey revealed that Singaporeans are, by quite a wide margin, the world's saddest people.

While more than 80 percent of Thais and Filipinos said they are happy, more than half of all Singaporeans admitted they are pretty miserable.

Indeed, they are several percentage points below the next glum lot, the citizens of Armenia, followed by those of Iraq, Yemen, Belarus and Afghanistan.

It seems weird that Singaporeans, living on their prosperous and manicured little island, are more downcast than war-torn Afghans, repressed Belarussians and dirt-poor Yemenis.

But take a step back and it becomes perfectly logical.

After all, what's there to be gleeful and fancy-free and full

of the joys of spring about in Singapore?

The people work, eat and shop. And that's it. Each moment is like going to school or university or army camp or the office – all the time. Everything is a task to be accomplished.

As one commentator wrote on Yahoo News Singapore after reading the Gallup report: "When you run a country like a business instead of a country, what do you expect?"

They don't even make babies – shopping takes precedence. There is no place on earth where the state promotes shopping as a meritorious and productive activity as it does in Singapore.

When you visit and tell Singaporeans you are from Phnom Penh or Paris or Patagonia, their first question is: How's the shopping there?

Oh, Ron. It is monumentally depressing.

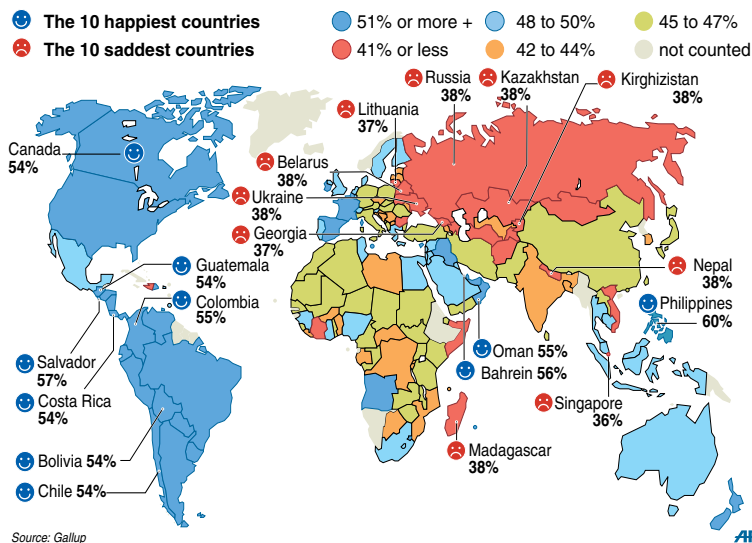
Not for the ruling People's Action Party, of course, because shopping is harmless and distracts people from thinking about politics and keeps the domestic market humming.

What it doesn't do is elicit positive answers when Gallup pollsters ask: do you smile a lot, do you do interesting things, do you have a sense of enjoyment and feel you are treated with respect?

Most Singaporeans clearly

Wealthy Singapore at bottom of happiness league

Gallup global happiness poll puts Singapore last, Philippines first among 148 countries



do not. Nor, without wishing to sound absurdly pompous, does their working and shopping lifestyle engender that sense of spiritual well-being and serenity we all cherish.

Being obsessive about eating is no substitute either, not when you gush over staples like chicken rice, char kway teow and laksa as if they are akin to discovering Xanadu.

When your life is largely filled by work and fleeting kicks from

shopping and eating, then you are going to get very glum very fast.

So it is no surprise that in another poll last month, Singaporeans were ranked as the least emotional people in the world.

They hold things in, including happiness. Frankly, most of them wouldn't know a warm gun if it shot them.

That partly explains why the suicide rate, officially quite low,

is actually, as hospital directors privately confide, shockingly high.

Under pressure not to record them as hangings or ingestion of poison or defenestration, the suicides are registered as respiratory failures, or nervous seizures, or simply accidental deaths.

Smoking is another give-away. Singapore has among the most draconian anti-smoking laws in the world, yet the locals puff away like there's no tomorrow.

Just take an early morning stroll around the café and bar areas and note the pavements littered with fag-ends.

And that illustrates another myth – the place is not squeaky clean, nor is it corruption free. This month another top figure, the speaker of parliament, had to resign because of bad behaviour.

It follows other corruption charges this year against the Singapore Civil Defence Force director, senior officials at the Singapore Land Authority, and the head of the Central Narcotics Bureau.

When you live a fantasy propagated by a government that supplies adult pacifiers like new shopping malls and food courts and precious little else, you are going to fail the quality of life test.

And that's what's happened to Singapore.

Training for journalists

With the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) International Programme for the Development of Communication, Myanmar Consolidated Media, publisher of The Myanmar Times, is seeking applications for capacity-building programs for both beginner and senior print media journalists in Myanmar.

Two two-week training programs will be conducted for journalists with at least 1.5 years experience, while one three-week training course will be conducted for journalists with minimal or no experience. Trainees in the three-week program will have the opportunity to undertake an internship at The Myanmar Times upon concluding the course.

The programs will be conducted in January and February 2013 with one expatriate and one Myanmar journalism instructor. English skills and a university degree are preferred but not essential. Successful applicants will need to provide a release form from their employer for the duration of the course. For further information please write to the following email address: administration@myanmartimes.com.mm



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Call for applications for foreign and Myanmar journalism trainers

With the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) International Programme for the Development of Communication, Myanmar Consolidated Media, publisher of The Myanmar Times, is seeking applications from experienced journalists to implement capacity-building programs for both beginner and senior journalists in Myanmar.

Two two-week training programs will be conducted for journalists with at least 1.5 years experience, while one three-week training course will be conducted for journalists with minimal or no experience. The programs will be conducted in January and February 2013. We are seeking one foreign (Southeast Asia-based) journalism instructor with extensive print media experience, preferably in Asia, and one Myanmar journalism instructor with extensive print media experience. The employment period is expected to be for seven weeks consecutively.

Applicants should include a cover letter and CV outlining relevant experience. To submit an application or for further information please write to the following email address:

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MYANMAR CONSOLIDATED MEDIA LIMITED.

Turtle rescue centre opens in Shan State

By Aye Sapay Phyu

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

The Turtle Rescue Centre (TRC) was dedicated on December 6 at Zeepin Forest Reserve's Ban Bwe Tree Nursery, about 30 kilometres (18 miles) east of Pyin Oo Lwin.

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

U Than Myint, the country program director of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), said the centre will be used not only to handle turtles seized from traffickers, but also to conserve endangered turtle species and to prevent the spread of disease to other turtles when the animals are released back into the wild.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Buddhist conference held in Yangon

By Cherry Thein

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

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

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

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

Manmohan Singh's visit to Myanmar last May.

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

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

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

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

Among the presenters was Dr Hla Tun, associate head of the Pali language and



Performers present a show about the life of the Buddha at the National Theatre in Yangon on December 15. Pic: Ko Taik

literature department at Pariyati Sasana University in Yangon.

He told *The Myanmar Times* that the seminar

attracted a great deal of interest among people in Myanmar, even though it was the first time that such a gathering had been held

in the country.

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

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

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

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

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Censorship: a foreigner's experience

By Geoffrey Goddard

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

On a personal level my response to censorship has ranged from quiet exasperation to furious contempt. Censorship has been the cause of outbursts in the news room which proved beyond any doubt to many of my Myanmar colleagues that I am an uncivilised barbarian; it is the ostensible reason why my dearest Myanmar friend, Sonny Swe, the former deputy CEO of *The Myanmar Times*, one of the few civilian victims of the purge of Military Intelligence in 2004, was sentenced to 14 years' jail the following year. It was eight years in November since he was taken away.

I knew that I would be working under one of the worst censorship regimes in the world when I accepted a position with *The Myanmar Times* in June 2001, so what was the attraction?

The attraction was that I had already spent more than 10 years working in this part of the world, most of them in Thailand, but also in Singapore and Cambodia, and I badly wanted to return, even if that involved breaking a promise I had made to myself after the tragic events in Myanmar in 1988 that I would never come back here until it was a democracy.

Another factor was that working under censorship was not a new experience: During

the 10 years I worked for *Radio Australia* I was selected for an exchange program with *Radio Beijing* and I worked there from December 1988 until a few days after the Tiananmen massacre. After I left *Radio Australia* in 1997, I spent 18 months working for a government radio station in Singapore.

Those experiences of working with censorship certainly made it easier to adjust to my position as editor of the English edition of *The Myanmar Times*, a position I held until the end of 2005. But that did not mean there were some censorship decisions which either appalled or amazed me. And some which did not surprise me at all, mainly involving Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

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

After the MI purge we were censored, like all private sector publications, by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), to which we had to send A3 copies of every page. To fill holes caused by stories or pictures being rejected or cut, we had to send what we called alternate stories as backups. It was also necessary to roster a sub-editor on every Saturday night to make the necessary adjustments to pages after they had been mutilated by the censor. A minor upside of the



Geoffrey Goddard conducting a journalism workshop at *The Myanmar Times* in December 2009. Working under censorship in Myanmar was frustrating, he said last week, but being able to make a contribution to building capacity in the media sector, even if only a small one, was very satisfying. Pic: Supplied

end of pre-publication censorship in August was no longer having to squander our Saturday nights on tasks that involved a denial of the truth.

The censorship decision that left me most flabbergasted was the ban on running any story about the death of Ne Win in early December 2002. I could not believe that no private sector newspaper was allowed to mention anything about the man who had run the country for 26 years and, many would say, ran it into the ground.

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

Some of the most petty censorship decisions involved mentions of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

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

We reported that she arrived at party headquarters "amid cheers from a jubilant crowd of several hundred party members and supporters." That was deleted and we were instructed to write that she arrived at party

headquarters and "met local and international journalists".

In September 2002, a service to commemorate the victims of the September 11 attacks in the US the previous year was held at a Yangon hotel. *The Myanmar Times* reported that among the 150 people who attended was the leader of the NLD, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We were instructed to delete the reference to her and say that "executive committee members of the NLD were among the audience."

Some censorship decisions reflected a sensitivity, or perhaps

sentence quoting the US report as accusing the Myanmar government of restricting some religious activities, "Including the building of churches and mosques."

Some censorship decisions were a source of amusement.

In June this year, the French newsagency, AFP, to which *The Myanmar Times* subscribes, ran a report quoting the then head of PSRD, U Tint Swe, as saying that the end of pre-publication censorship was imminent.

AFP contacted me for a comment, which I gave anonymously, observing that U Tint Swe had one of the worst jobs in Myanmar, because "he was pressured from above by ministers, officials and powerful business people to keep stories out and pressured from below by editors to keep stories in".

The censors cut that paragraph from the story. They censored a story about censorship.

On August 20, U Tint Swe summoned the editors of dozens of weekly and monthly news publications to a meeting in Yangon to announce the end of pre-publication censorship. It has been one of the most significant changes of the reform process driven by President U Thein Sein. It has certainly been one of the most celebrated reforms by members of the fourth estate.

One of the most deeply satisfying consequences of the end of pre-publication censorship for me has been to observe how much more motivated are my Myanmar colleagues because they know their stories will be published.

It is wonderful to see.

(This is an edited version of a talk by Geoffrey Goddard in a Yangon hotel on December 11 to a visiting group of prominent Australian women headed by Ms Janelle Saffin, a federal MP).

THE MYANMARTIMES

August 27 - September 2, 2012 Myanmar's first international weekly Volume 33, No. 641 1200 Kyats

Goodbye to the red pen

But what does the future hold for Myanmar's print media? Read the full coverage on pages 3, 4 and 5

free press set to continue

Reps move towards impeachment

Both houses of parliament push for removal of tribunal, after president refuses to order members to resign

By Soe Than Lynn and Win Ko Ko Latt

MYANMAR'S first constitutional crisis rumbled on without a resolution last week, in what is shaping up as a major test of the political system established under the 2008 constitution.

On August 24, the Amyetha Huttaw agreed to discuss a proposal to impeach the Constitutional Tribunal after President U Thein Sein ruled out forcing its members to resign.

The proposal, signed by 162 MPs, was proposed by U Zaw Myint and supported by 167 of the 223 representatives present on August 24, with only military representatives voting against it.

Earlier this month, the Pyithu Huttaw had set a deadline of August 21 for the tribunal members to resign voluntarily rather than be impeached. The dispute concerns the tribunal's March 28 decision that parliamentary committees and commissions are not considered union-level organisations.

Representatives insist that the decision was incorrect, as the status of committees as union-level bodies is stated in parliamentary laws enacted by the State Peace and Development Council. They cite section 445 of the constitution, which states: "The preparatory work done by the SPDC, before this constitution, comes into operation, to bring the constitution into operation, shall be deemed to have been carried out in accord with this constitution."

They are seeking to impeach the tribunal's members under section 334(a)(i) – breach of any of the provisions under the Constitution – and 336(a)(v) – insufficient discharge of duties assigned by law.

"We have accused the whole tribunal of failing to follow the constitution," U Zaw Myint Pe said.

"They are not fulfilling their duty to preserve the fundamental law and breaching the law. They ignore the fundamental agreement of the state as well as disregard it."

However, at a rare press conference on August 20 – a day before the Pyithu Huttaw's chairman, U Thein Sein, said he and his colleagues would "continue to do the duties entrusted by the state".

More page 4

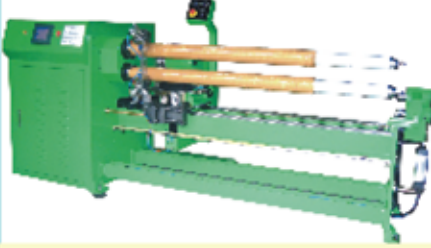
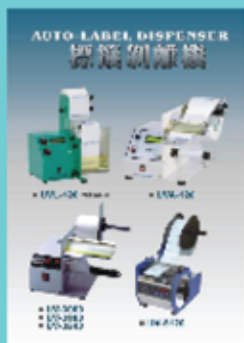
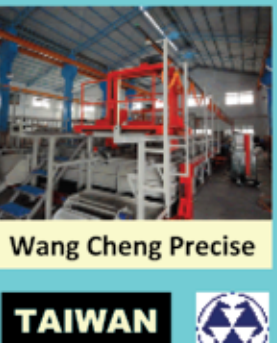
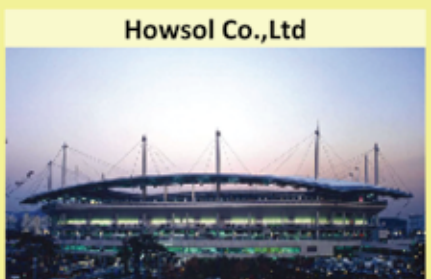
Oh frabjous day! The Myanmar Times reports the end of pre-publication censorship.



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Heritage trust got it wrong: Pansodan building owners

By Htar Htar Khin

THE owners of apartments in a Pansodan Street building on which demolition work was halted after a media campaign have challenged statements by heritage activists that it has an historic connection to the Dobama Asiayone independence movement.

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

The four owners, whose apartments each covered a floor of the building, were evicted by the YCDC in September. The site's developer, United Construction Company, planned to build a 12-storey condominium on the site and the four owners said it had agreed to provide them with an apartment on the same level as the residence they had vacated.

The owners last week condemned the decision to halt the demolition work, saying that not knowing where they would next live was causing unnecessary suffering and could result in unexpected expense.

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

She said the rear of the building had suffered serious

structural damage because of water leakage and the YCDC had been justified to impose the demolition order.

"We have already moved out of the building and if it cannot be demolished who will pay for what would be a major renovation? Will the Yangon Heritage Trust pay for our expenses?" said Daw Tin Tin San.

"It's like waiting for an endless future," she said. "What I want to ask is can anyone produce the evidence that proves this building is an historic icon."

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

U Zaw Tin said the Dobama Asiayone (We Burmans Association), which had agitated for independence from the British, had an office in the second floor of the adjoining building.

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

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

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

"The message I want to give is that this building is not a heritage building and that those from the Yangon Heritage Trust should be more careful about what they say," U Zaw Tin said.

The general manager of United Construction, Daw Tin Tin Wai, said the demolition halt order meant that the company was also facing "hardships and difficulties".

She said the company had paid each apartment owner a year's rent in advance for alternative accommodation and also had to pay for the cost of designing the 12-storey condominium.

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

In a response last week to the concerns raised by the apartment owners, Dr Thant Myint-U said the only reason the YCDC had put a demolition order on the building was because it had been assessed as a dangerous building.

"We'd like to help and see

if using the latest methods and international assistance, if necessary, it would be possible still to save the building and then to improve and modernise the interior for the tenant families," he said in the emailed response.

"We are also in discussion with YCDC to see if we can be part of all future assessments of similar buildings."

Dr Thant Myint-U said that if there was no way to save the building, the Yangon Heritage Trust would like to ensure that the replacement building was appropriate to its context in terms of its height and design.

"I'm sure this can be done in a way that it good for the tenants, good for the owners, and in the long-term public interest of the city," he said. "What I would hate to see is a beautiful and historic building torn down that could be saved. But we need also to place a high priority on the needs of existing families in the neighbourhood, in particular low-income families that may have few options."

"We need conservation to work for the poor of Yangon. There are win-win solutions and we'd like to work with government on finding those solutions urgently."



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

UK to provide aid to Kachin refugees

By Justin Heifetz

THE United Kingdom will partner with non-governmental organisation Trocaire to provide more humanitarian aid to those displaced by violence in Kachin State, a British government official announced on December 21.

"We must act now to relieve the immediate suffering and to ensure the conditions do not worsen to cause further loss of life as the winter draws in," said Justine Greening, the UK's secretary of state for international development, and the minister responsible for the Department for International Development (DFID) and the UK's aid program.

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

According to the DFID's official press release, the UK support delivered via Trocaire over the next five months will provide nearly 16,000 people with basic food rations; almost 22,000 people with

US\$7.55 cash grants each, for meat and vegetables or the equivalent in cooked meals and basic hygiene support; and about 1300 people with sufficient shelter.

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

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

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

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

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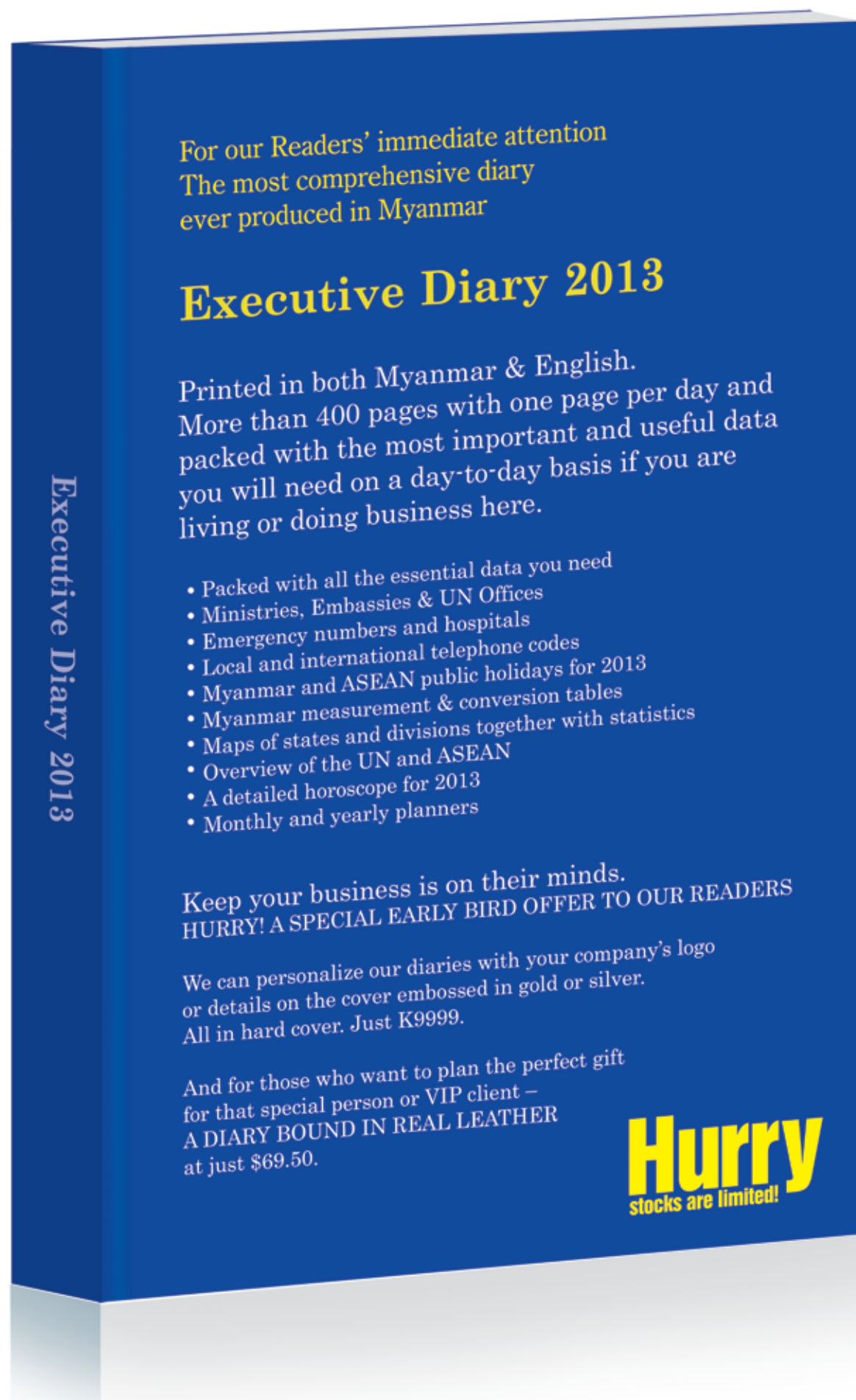
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Nippon Foundation sends aid to conflict areas

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

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

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

The Chiang Mai-based council, established in November 2010, has 11 members, including the NMSP, Kachin Independence Organisation and Karen National Union.

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

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

The ceremony was attended by Minister U Aung Min from the President's Office, who heads the government's peace negotiation team; NMSP chairman U Nai Htaw Mon; Nippon Foundation chairman Yohei Sasakawa; and other officials.

"It is unprecedented that such a large aid package is to be given to the armed force of a minority group, and an extraordinary move for the government, which has given the go-ahead for this," said a statement released by the foundation.

U Aung Min said at the ceremony that the launch of the project marks the first time that international aid has been accepted for ethnic refugees within Myanmar.

He said that forging genuine peace would allow nearly three million people to "come back to Myanmar", including 100,000 soldiers serving in armed ethnic groups, 446,000 internally displaced persons, 350,000 people living in refugee camps on the borders with neighbouring countries, and two million migrant workers in Thailand.

U Aung Min said the Myanmar government does not have the funds to



Nippon Foundation chairman Yohei Sasakawa (second left) and government officials hand a bag of rice over to officials from the New Mon State Party, at a ceremony held in Mawlamyine, Mon State, on December 22. Pic: Thiri

implement rehabilitation processes for all the people in need, so efforts are being made to meet these needs by soliciting international assistance from nonprofit organisations.

"Some international organisations have pledged their support, but until now we have not received anything," he said.

"Now the Nippon Foundation has pledged \$3 million in support, and we will distribute these emergency supplies to refugees step by step. Next we will provide support in Kayin State, perhaps in January."

U Aung Min said that

the Japanese government eventually plans to provide another \$300 million in support for refugee relief programs, \$60 million of which will come from the Nippon Foundation.

Mr Sasakawa said at the ceremony in Mawlamyine that it is the duty of Japan and other countries to support the development of Myanmar, and that the aim of the foundation was not only to support refugees but also to help build trust between ethnic groups and the government in a way that would lead to lasting peace.

"The Myanmar government has not officially accepted

the UNFC, so we acted as a bridge by negotiating between the two groups. We would like to see peace and development in Myanmar," he said.

U Nai Htaw Mon said he was "pleased to accept the aid" and thanked the Nippon Foundation for helping the NMSP "practically and without discrimination", although he added that the donation was not enough to help all refugees.

He also urged all relevant players in the peace process to hold a political dialogue conference similar to the one held in Panglong, Shan State, in 1947 that created a blueprint for the

administration of ethnic areas in Myanmar.

"Then we can build a federal union that can lead to genuine peace and national solidarity throughout the nation, and even provide clear instructions for the peace process," he said.

"We also want to get genuine peace. We hold weapons and fight while we are also calling to get our rights and self-determination."

The NMSP was founded in 1962 as an opposition group to the military government. The organisation signed a ceasefire agreement with the new government on February 12, 2012.

Entrepreneur course, competition launched

By Yhoon Hnin

YOUNG would-be entrepreneurs are invited to learn about business in the Youth to Social Enterprise Workshop later this month at MICT Park. The most successful participants can win a cash prize, as well as entry to the Myanmar Social Enterprise Challenge competition on February 17. Particular attention will be paid in the course to social enterprise.

U Myo Win, president of PS Business School, which is organising the competition, said: "Social Enterprise means caring not only for the shareholders, but also other stakeholders like employees, the green environment and the community to get a win-win situation between profit-oriented and social activities. Many companies only look for profits without considering other factors. Social Enterprise is a way both to make a profit while undertaking social activities, and combining the pros of both business and social work." U Myo Min explained to *The Myanmar Times*.

The two-day workshop will be taught on 23 and 30 December from 9am to 5pm. Applicants are limited to 100 students between the ages of 18 and 30 years. The fee for the class is K10,000 and 10 candidates will be selected to compete for the scholarship on the basis of an essay explaining why they are interested in the class and the scholarship.

Subjects to be taught include presentation skills, business environment, nature of social enterprise, social problems, business models and impact assessment. The applicants for the February 17 competition are expected to write a business proposal, and will be divided into eight groups. Each group will be offered \$100, with an additional \$1000 for the first prize winner in each group, \$500 for the second prize winner and \$300 for the third. Those interested in the workshop and competition should contact room D, third floor, Myaenigone Plaza or call (01) 500-533 and 09-4310-7150.

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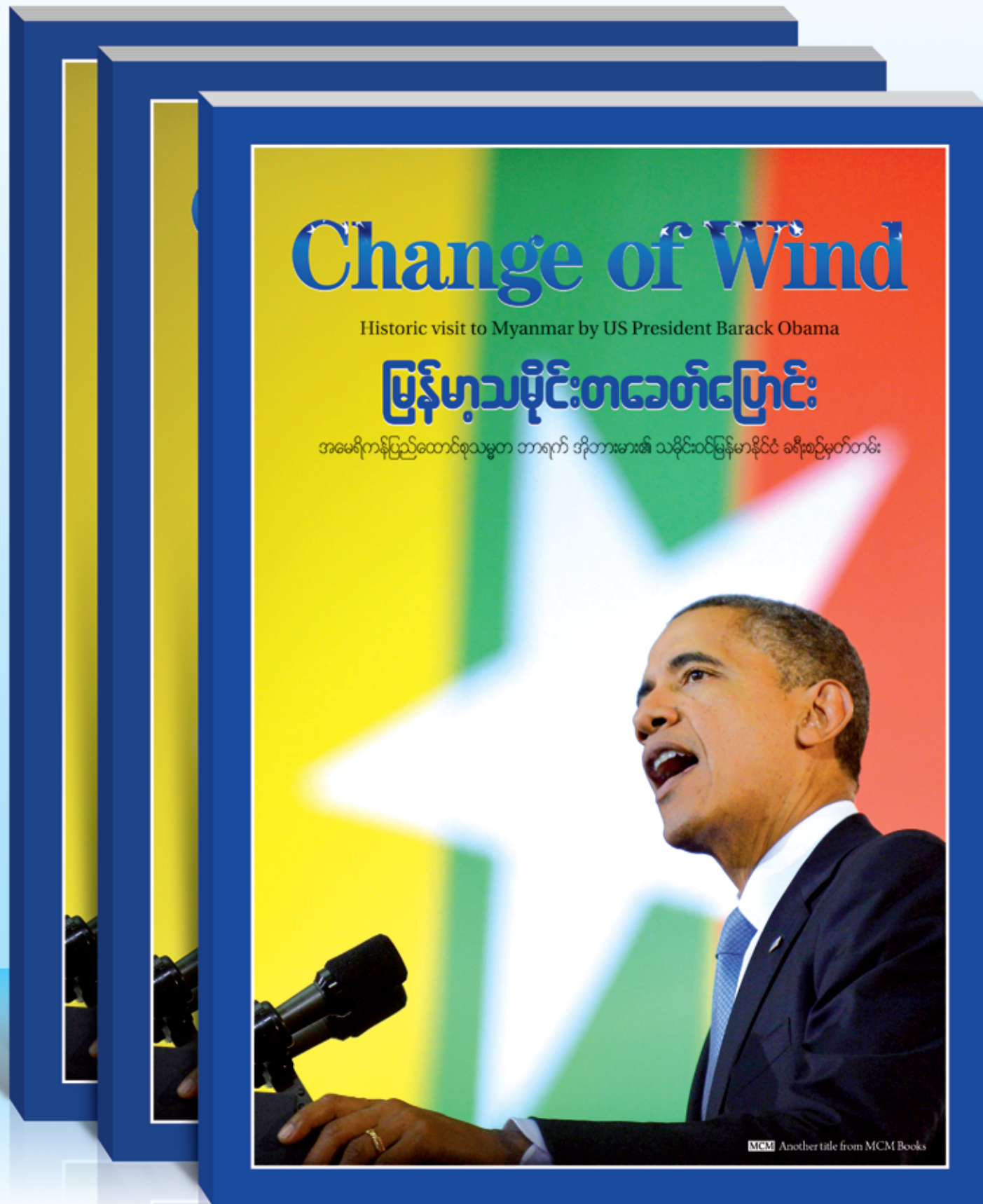
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Applicants should send a one page abridged curriculum vitae together with a covering letter summarizing the reasons why they believe they are the most suitable person for the position. Applications will be accepted until end of January 2013 and can be sent to



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The fiscal year in review: 2012 - 2013

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

By Aye Thidar Kyaw

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rental rates for hotel rooms, as well as prime residential and office spaces, have skyrocketed, catapulting Yangon to 35th on international ratings agency Mercer's cost of



A man holds a can of Coca Cola in downtown Yangon earlier this year. American giants Coca Cola, Pepsi and General Electric have all responded to the easing of sanctions by entering Myanmar. Pic: Stuart Deed

living for expats index, released in June 2012.

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

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

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

But Dr Turnell said the effects of the economic reforms will be slight.

"Such reforms are still in their very early stages, and to some extent are just necessary steps to other reforms that could become the real drivers of transformational growth," he said. "But the latter are not yet in place."

He added that there are many small measures that can be taken to deliver quick benefits and swing popular support behind an economic reform program. These include removing some restrictions on banks that disallow them

'Reforms are still in their very early stages, and to some extent are just necessary steps to other reforms that could become the real drivers of transformational growth. But the latter are not yet in place.'

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Taking a look back at the country's economy

From page 17

from providing capital to farmers and cultivators; moving quickly to lower prices on SIM cards, and bring in competition in the telecommunications sector; act to ensure that all remaining government controls on farmers (especially those that tell them what, when and how to grow) are removed; publishing a detailed set of public accounts that includes both revenue and spending items in order to better ensure transparency and accountability in public finance; modify the Farmland Bill to give genuine security of land tenure to farmers; end the system of import licensing that unnecessarily increases the prices of desired and necessary imports, encourages cronyism, and keeps the kyat artificially high by restricting the demand for foreign currencies.

"Of course, there are more foundational and long-term measures to be enacted to but all of the above can be put in place straight away, and deliver quick, positive returns," he said.

In terms of the government's budget allocation, the former regime's budget was complicated and difficult to track, he said. It contributed only about 3 percent for health and 5pc for education until the 2012-13 fiscal year.

In early November, the amended foreign investment law was enacted, ending months of wrangling between parliamentarians, the business community, Myanmar Investment Commission and President U Thein Sein.

Some foreign companies have already entered the market, even though more specific investment rules are yet to be determined.

Myanmar must encourage investment that

brings development and jobs to its people to catch up with the region after 50 years of mismanagement, said economist U Khine Htun.

To do so, Myanmar needs to harness its natural resources and use them to develop new industries beyond the extractives sector that also bring knowledge and learning to its people.

Modernising the agriculture sector should

'The situation is different now than it was in the past. However, clearly aspects of the 'old Myanmar' continue to haunt the new, as the problems with old deals with Chinese state-owned firms amply illustrate.'

be the top priority since it employs so many people and could be a source of significant foreign exchange earnings. Improvements would also deliver food security and provide a reliable foundation for Myanmar to move into processing, light manufacturing and other sectors, according to Dr Turnell.

"The situation is different now than it was in the past. However, clearly aspects of the 'old Myanmar' continue to haunt the new, as the problems with old deals with Chinese state-owned firms amply illustrate," Dr Turnell said.

"Likewise, there have

as yet been few reforms in critical areas that impact most upon the lives of normal people. The lack of improvement in agriculture is especially striking, especially given that the sector could be lifted mightily simply by lessening state intervention," he said.

Ministry of Commerce consultant Dr Maung Aung said every ministry has been reforming. The Ministry of Commerce, for example, has been trying to create a level playing field for traders to halt price fixing, and has also liberalised trade licensing and cut red tape.

"We can see the government trying to be fair in trade like other nations, which we've never seen before," he said.

However, the government faces concerted resistance from the people on some projects, such as Myitsone dam and the Letpadaung copper mine, as well as an ethnic conflict in Rakhine State and armed conflict in Kachin State.

"These may be barriers for foreign investment but we need global trade and investment to help us to escape from being a poor country," he said.

Dr Maung Maung Lay, vice president of Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), said international attention had centred on Myanmar in 2012.

"Economic reform will come after political reforms; international businessmen think of Myanmar as the gateway between China and India, where there is a very big market," he said.

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

Visa's service moves too fast for partner



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

By Justin Heifetz

VISA cards are accepted at about 90 automatic teller machines operated by Co-operative Bank and Kanbawza Bank throughout the country, Visa Inc announced last week.

But while KBZ reports that operations with Visa are running smoothly, CB is waiting for Visa to repair technical problems that come amid a heavy volume of customer complaints.

From December 26, Visa cardholders could access cash in Yangon and at other major tourist destinations, covered by CB and KBZ banks' combined Visa ATM network, Visa said.

For all Visa withdrawals in Myanmar, the transaction fee is set at K5000. A cardholder can withdraw up to K240,000 (US\$200) per transaction.

By joining the Visa network, CB and KBZ have agreed to adopt Visa's global security standards for electronic payment, Visa said.

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

"In all my meetings in Yangon, the lights were going on and off and the air-conditioning was going on and off," Mr Maher told *The Wall Street Journal* on November 3. "This is Myanmar; everyone is doing things for the first time."

CB has 45 ATMs that accept Visa nationwide, nearly 40 of which are in Yangon, said U Pe Myint, managing director of CB. Other ATMs that accept Visa are in Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, Bago and Taunggyi.

In Yangon, CB has three ATMs that accept Visa at Yangon International Airport. There are also CB ATMs that accept Visa at major retail outlets such as Junction Square, Junction

Centre, Taw Win Centre, Yankin Centre and Bogyoke Market.

At hotels, CB has ATMs that accept Visa at Chatrium Hotel, Parami Hotel, Inle Hotel, and Governor's Residence in Yangon.

While CB has plans to install ATMs at Yangon's Traders and Parkroyal hotels, "It is taking a long time because of IT problems," U Pe Myint said.

U Pe Myint told *The Myanmar Times* CB has been slammed with customer complaints over faulty withdrawals, as "cardholders cannot get their money due to limitations on the machines".

'With MasterCard, we are 90 percent okay, but with Visa we are not.'

He explained that CB cannot tell the cardholder what their current balance is.

"On our side, we cannot see the [account holder's] balance on the screen of the ATM," U Pe Myint said.

"We've contacted Visa to make repairs. With MasterCard, we are 90 percent okay, but with Visa we are not," U Pe Myint said.

"There have been a lot of complaints from the customers that they cannot withdraw money from the ATM."

"We've explained the consequences and we have a call centre for customers with questions."

Meanwhile, KBZ's general manager U Zaw Lin Htut told *The Myanmar Times* they have not experienced any customer complaints or technical problems since they launched their ATMs that accept Visa on December 21.

KBZ has 37 ATMs that accept Visa nationwide, 26 of which are in Yangon, according to U Zaw Lin Htut.

Although KBZ is still waiting to install ATMs that accept Visa in Yangon International Airport and at hotels, they are currently available in Yangon at Junction Square, Taw Win Centre, City Mart supermarkets.

"We are waiting to install an ATM that accepts Visa at Yangon International Airport, but it could be as early as next week," U Zaw Lin Htut told *The Myanmar Times*.

"We don't have any [ATMs that accept Visa] at hotels right now because we need approval from the Ministry of Tourism first, but we will install them soon and we are currently in a dialogue," he said.

Outside of Yangon, KBZ has ATMs that accept Visa in Mandalay and Taunggyi. The bank plans to install 50 to 60 more Visa-ready ATMs nation-wide, U Zaw Lin Htut said.

To manage cross border ATM processing, Visa has partnered with Planet Payment to connect CB and KBZ ATMs to VisaNet.

Philip Beck, chairman and chief executive officer of Planet Payment, told Thai newspaper *The Nation* that the company's processing system enables payments to meet the needs of particular markets. "Visa and Planet Payment share the vision that payments have the power to improve the way business is done and we are very excited to be working together to deliver innovative payment solutions to banks, merchants and consumers in developing economies around the world," *The Nation* quoted him as saying on December 26.

Visa is the second such financial service to enter Myanmar, after MasterCard made the country's first multinational card ATM transaction at CB bank's headquarters at the corner of 23rd Street and Strand Road in Yangon on November 15.

Visa, the world's largest payment network, signed its first licensing agreements in Myanmar with CB, KBZ and Myanmar Oriental banks at Sedona Hotel in Yangon on November 3.

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Wall Street beaten as Southeast Asia opens door for Malaysian banks

By Joyce Koh

IN a year when many of its overseas investment-banking rivals are cutting jobs in response to dwindling profits, Malaysia's largest lender is grappling with the opposite problem.

"Our guys are working flat out," said Tengku Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, chief executive officer of Malayan Banking Bhd (MAY)'s investment bank, in an interview in Singapore. "To grow further, we need to recruit. For the number of deals we're doing, the kind of expansion plans we have, we need to have people."

Maybank, as the bank is known, and local competitor CIMB Group Holdings Bhd (CIMB) are riding a surge in mergers and stock sales in Southeast Asia, a region spanning the Philippines to Thailand. Adding headcount and acquiring competitors, their ambition is to grow into regional investment-banking powerhouses to compete in Asia with the likes of Goldman Sachs Group Inc (GS) and Morgan Stanley (MS). History shows it won't be easy.

"The landscape is littered with regional banks that have tried to get into investment banking and ultimately struggled," said Christian Brun, a Hong Kong-based partner at executive search firm Wellesley Partners who specialises in recruiting investment bankers. "The ones who are building their businesses today are going to have to do it in a much more considered and thoughtful way."

In parlaying home-market dominance into regional aspirations, Maybank and CIMB are echoing a strategy attempted by Japan's Daiwa Securities Group Inc, Macquarie Group Ltd (MQG) of Australia, and South Korea's Samsung Securities Co in past years. Yet those



Pedestrians walk past a branch of Maybank in Singapore. Pic: Bloomberg

firms have retrenched in the face of a global slowdown in mergers, share sales and trading.

Adding to the challenge, some global rivals are taking aim at Maybank and CIMB's home region. Citigroup Inc (C) has doubled its number of investment bankers focused on Southeast Asia in the last

record \$137.1 billion reached in 2007, data compiled by Bloomberg show. Sales of domestic bonds jumped 33pc to a record \$80 billion from the previous high of \$60 billion set last year.

Malaysia is poised to end this year as the world's fifth-largest market for initial public offerings, up from

Tengku Zafrul. The division currently employs some 3,000 people.

The lender bought Singapore's Kim Eng Holdings Ltd. in April last year for S\$1.79 billion (\$1.5 billion), giving it stock-broking and investment banking operations in Singapore, Thailand,

securities operations in Asia. CIMB said in June that the \$142 million purchase would enable it to compete with banks like JPMorgan Chase & Co (JPM) across Asia.

"We want to be an Asia-Pacific investment bank," said Charon Wardini Mokhzani, CEO of CIMB Investment Bank Bhd, which added more than 300 people through the RBS deal. "The plan is to complete and bed down this acquisition, and grow next year based on the enlarged platform we now have."

Pretax profit at Maybank Kim Eng fell 6pc in the latest fiscal year to 135.5 million ringgit (\$44 million). In the same period, CIMB Investment Bank's pretax profit jumped 75pc to 140 million ringgit.

DBS Group Holdings Ltd, Southeast Asia's largest lender, is taking a more cautious approach to investment banking. CEO Piyush Gupta said in November that he plans to build the Singapore-based company's fixed-income business while avoiding any large-scale expansion in equity underwriting or mergers advisory.

"Any M&A activity and advisory activity in the region we can do because we know the clients, but it's not a huge part of our business," he said on November 1. "Fixed income I like because it matches with what we do well and we don't need a lot of prima donna bankers to try and do that."

Among this year's most high-profile Asian deals, at least two feature Southeast Asian targets or buyers: The battle for Singapore's Fraser & Neave Ltd (FNN) between Thai billionaire Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi and a group led by Overseas Union Enterprise Ltd., backed by Indonesia's Lippo Group; and the \$9.4 billion purchase of a stake in China's second-largest insurer by another Thai billionaire, Dhanin

Chearavanont.

The regional banks are confronting an advisory market in Asia now dominated by U.S. and European institutions. Led by New York-based Goldman Sachs, they occupy the top seven spots among mergers advisers for companies in the Asia-Pacific region this year, data compiled by Bloomberg show. In equity and equity-linked products, eight of the top 10 underwriters are Western banks, the data show.

Maybank and CIMB are having mixed success in Southeast Asian investment banking this year as measured by volume of business. Maybank jumped in sales of shares and convertible bonds to sixth this year from No. 10 in 2011, while CIMB advanced to third from fourth. Both banks gave ground to rivals in mergers advisory in the region during 2012, the data show. They still lead their Western competitors in underwriting domestic bond sales there.

Since buying Kim Eng, Maybank has been pushing commercial bankers to work more closely with dealmakers, Tengku Zafrul said. While pitching to manage the IPO of AirAsia X Sdn., the lender proposed establishing a co-branded credit card with the Malaysian carrier, he said.

Maybank was hired to arrange the share sale, together with CIMB and Credit Suisse Group AG, according to AirAsia X's draft listing prospectus filed in November.

"It's exactly these banks who are very serious competitors," Markus Boehme, a partner at Munich-based consultant Roland Berger, said of Maybank and CIMB. "They have the strong footprint on the ground and more importantly, they have the funding base that many global players lack."

-Bloomberg

'Capital markets are open and receptive to the Southeast Asia story.'

three years. HSBC Holdings Plc tripled headcount at its investment banking unit in the region over the same period and plans to expand the division's workforce by another 15 percent next year, according to Chang Tou Chen, head of global banking for Southeast Asia.

The region's buoyant investment banking industry, underpinned by rising consumer demand and easy credit, contrasts with a depressed global dealmaking market. The value of mergers involving companies in Southeast Asia has swelled to \$136.5 billion this year, close to the

14th in 2011, beating Canada and the UK with \$6.8 billion of deals as the benchmark stock index rallied to a record in November. It trails Hong Kong fundraising by 14pc.

"Capital markets are open and receptive to the Southeast Asia story," said Farhan Faruqi, Citigroup's head of corporate and investment banking for the Asia-Pacific region. "You will see more headlines made from Southeast Asia in the coming months and years."

Maybank plans to boost headcount at its investment banking and brokerage business by 10pc a year until 2015, according to

Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. It plans to expand by recruiting institutional sales, equity and advisory bankers who cover industries such as utilities, oil and gas.

The unit, called Maybank Kim Eng, will focus on expanding in Southeast Asia through 2015; after that, Maybank plans to continue growing in the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East, Tengku Zafrul said.

CIMB, which was Malaysia's top-ranked stock underwriter over the past four years, in April acquired most of Royal Bank of Scotland Group Plc's



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Japan's biggest bank buys stake in VN lender

HANOI – Japan's biggest bank Mitsubishi UFJ last week bought a 20 percent stake worth US\$743 million in state-owned VietinBank, the largest foreign investment in Vietnam's banking sector.

The deal aims to boost "support for Japanese companies operating in Vietnam", Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ president Nobuyuki Hirano said on December 27, and to tap Southeast Asian markets after seeing its profits tumble this year.

The Japanese bank in November reported that profit in the six months

to September dived 58pc year-on-year to \$3.6 billion, due partly to declines in stock holdings.

VietinBank, or Vietnam Joint Stock Commercial Bank for Industry and Trade, said the majority of its shares will still be owned by the State Bank of Vietnam but it described the deal as "the largest ever M&A (mergers and acquisitions) transaction" in Vietnam's banking sector.

After a decade of rapid and chaotic bank liberalisation, Vietnam has 42 domestic

banks. Many are overloaded with debt, much of it held by inefficient and poorly-managed state owned companies.

Analysts stress the need to woo more foreign players into the banking sector to inject new cash and bring greater expertise.

Earlier in December, Moody's downgraded Vietnam's credit rating from "B1" to "B2", citing weaknesses in the banking system that may hit medium-term growth, and "an elevated risk" of a costly government banking bailout.

– AFP

Vietnam's rulers embrace past as complaints rise over present

By Cat Barton

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Everyone seemed to earn less this year, everyone is complaining. People are not happy with the government's performance," he said on December 23, as the city marked the 40th anniversary of the 1972 "Christmas Bombings".

The aerial bombardment saw American B-52s and other aircraft drop 20,000 tons of bombs on or near Hanoi after peace talks with North Vietnam broke down.

Once touted as the next "Asian Tiger", Vietnam's economy has



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

run aground – its banking system drowning in toxic debts, foreign direct investment down sharply

"The formal political system doesn't work.... You can't run a country like this. It is sclerotic,"

"You can't run a country like this. It is sclerotic."

and dozens of major state-owned companies hovering near bankruptcy.

From exorbitant healthcare costs and substandard education to traffic congestion, experts say the deep flaws in Hanoi's version of state-mandated capitalism are surfacing in all areas of daily life.

said Adam Fforde, a professorial fellow at the Centre for Strategic Economic Studies at Victoria University in Melbourne.

"People have lost confidence in the idea that there is somebody there who can pull levers and make things happen," he said.

During the past 20 years, Vietnam has used a Chinese-

style mix of free markets and authoritarian governance to achieve rapid growth, but experts say deeper economic as well as political reforms are needed.

The current economic sluggishness is intensifying pressure on the leadership. About a million young people enter the workforce each year and economists warn job creation and skills training are not keeping pace.

"The state apparatus is in a bit of a stupor," said Jonathan London, an assistant professor in the Department of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong.

Despite being a one-party state, Vietnam has an "extremely fragmented power structure" within its vast communist apparatus, which means tough decisions are often not taken when needed, he said.

From the World Bank to party economists, there is widespread recognition of what needs to be done to lift competitiveness and boost GDP growth that was this year the weakest since 1999.

Reform the state sector, recapitalise banks and tackle corruption or "the dream of the economic miracle in Vietnam, which seemed like such a sure and palpable thing 10 years ago, will continue to dissipate," London said.

The communist party itself seems aware of the problems – at a plenum in October mistakes were admitted in the stewardship of the economy but no officials were sanctioned.

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

"It is not clear who is capable of doing such a thing," he added.

Instead, Vietnam is stuck with "a sort of corrupt, patrimonial style of rule that leads to Bentleys and Rolls-Royces on the one hand, and tens of millions of people who aren't doing so well on the other", London said. – AFP

South Korean finance ministry cuts growth outlook

SEOUL – The South Korean government last week slashed the nation's growth outlook for 2012 and 2013, citing the eurozone debt crisis and US fiscal woes that continue to dampen global demand.

In a biannual economic outlook, the finance ministry revised its earlier estimate of 4.0 percent growth in 2013 to 3.0pc, and the 2012 estimate from 3.3pc to 2.1pc.

"The economy continues to slow... as global demand dragged down by prolonged eurozone debt crisis and lingering uncertainty dampen

sentiment," the ministry said in a statement on December 27.

The growth of Asia's fourth-largest economy will continue to be limited in the first half 2013, but will "slightly improve" in the latter half when its major markets are expected to show signs of recovery, it added.

Exports account for about a half of the South's economy and have been pummelled recently by a general slowdown in developed countries. But the ministry predicted overseas shipments of cars, mobile gadgets

and other products and services would increase 4.3pc in 2013 after shrinking 1.3pc in 2012.

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

Consumer prices are expected to rise 2.7pc in 2013, faster than this year's 2.2pc but within the central bank's target range of between 2.5 and 3.5pc. – AFP



Toyota Motor president Akio Toyoda at a news conference in Tokyo on December 25 to launch the new 'Crown' sedan. In the US the next day, the company announced a massive payout to settle a class action lawsuit. Pic: AFP

Toyota agrees to \$1.1b deal for US recalls

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And in November, Toyota agreed to pay \$25.5 million to settle claims from shareholders who lost

money after the Japanese automaker's stock price plummeted in the wake of the recalls.

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

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

Earlier on December 26, Toyota forecast a 22 percent jump in worldwide sales in 2012 to 9.7 million units, driven by surging demand that may help it regain the top spot in the global auto market.

Those figures could put Toyota ahead of General Motors and Volkswagen as the world's biggest automaker, a title it held between 2008 and 2010 but lost last year after a slump in sales and production.

Japan's biggest automaker also said it expects to sell about 9.91 million vehicles in 2013, up two percent on-year.

"Toyota's outstanding performance this year is a proof that consumer sentiment for the company's products has already recovered to a degree as if nothing ever happened," said Jesse Toprak, an analyst with automotive site TrueCar.com.

The huge payout will "sting" Toyota, but it will also allow the Japanese giant to "leave these troubles behind and move forward in the new year," said Michelle Krebs, an analyst with automotive site Edmunds.com. – AFP

Another hazardous year looms for euro

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

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

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

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

For many months, all analysts could talk about was Greece's likely

exit from the eurozone and what it would mean for the bloc's future.

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

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

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

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

In September, Draghi said the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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MDY property market to remain unstable

By Phyo Wai Kyaw

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

Property prices in Mandalay's undeveloped areas on the outskirts of the city, particularly in Chanmyatharsi and Pyigyitagun townships, had doubled or even tripled in late 2011. Experienced brokers described the price boom as an "unnatural market".

About two months after the boom, the property

market remained steady until late July 2012. Some property soared to K30-50 million for a 2400 square foot plot on Mandalay's outskirts; meanwhile, prices downtown remained steady as it continued to develop and attracted demand.

"It is rare to see buyers in the market for property in both the outskirts and downtown area. The market in the outskirts has been affected by the issues [the Mandalay City Development Committee] has had with trespassers, so people are reluctant to buy property there. I think this situation will continue into 2013. It will take a long time

for Mandalay's property market to boom," broker U Khin Maung Thaung, from Htin Paw Estate Agency in Myo Thit, said.

Freelance broker U Aung Win said that Mandalay's unusual property market is the result of buyers purchasing large amounts of land on the outskirts before the spike in 2011, and then selling it for a high profit. After, he said, many other property-owners followed suit and left Mandalay's property market.

"The situation happened once in 2007, but when it happened in 2011, it made the market much worse than before," he said.

U Aung Win added that

investors should work to cool Mandalay's property market if they are looking to make a profit on property in the outskirts.

U Thant Zaw Linn, from Pwint Linn Estate Agency in Pyigyitagun township, said the market could stabilise again if property prices on the outskirts cool.

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

In August 2012, the government increased the property purchase tax from 15 percent to 30pc; if the buyer cannot provide proof of income, the government will add another 7pc.



Properties on Mandalay's 62nd Street, in Chanmyatharsi township's Myo Thit district, where prices are exorbitant. A 2400 square foot plot costs K500 million on average. Pic: Phyo Wai Kyaw

Shwe Taung announces plans for mega office complexes



Shwe Taung International Commercial Centre

By Htar Htar Khin

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

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

The second, the Union Business Centre, will be on Natmauk Road within

easy reach of a number of foreign embassies, as well as Kandawgyi Lake, Shwedagon Pagoda and Bogoyoke Aung San Museum.

The company announced the launch of the two developments at Sedona Hotel last week.

"We have designed the buildings to suit financial



Union Business Centre

institutions, international companies and high-class tenants. The location is convenient for banks, offices and the port," said Mr Yip Kam Thai, deputy managing director of Shwe Taung's real estate group.

The nine-storey SICC tower will comprise more than 190,000 square feet and 100 parking spaces.

The projected Union Business Centre will comprise one five-storey, 6000-square-metre building with two two-storey annexes with more than 500 square metres each, offering a total of some 90 parking spaces.

Mr Yip said prospective tenants included Japan-based companies, representative offices

and small and medium enterprises.

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

Yangon's Aung Mingalar highway station to get upgrade

By Noe Noe Aung

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

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

"The station is not formed very well, because Aung Mingalar used to be a big market. The government transformed it to a highway station

later," he said.

U Nyan Tun Aung said that the YCDC is repairing the roads to the highway and building a bus-arrival stand as their first priority.

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

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

"There are a total of

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

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

"For our later plans, we will announce them when we finish our first priorities," he said.

U Nyan Tun Aung said the YCDC could not disclose the budget on the project.



Busses at Aung Mingalar highway station earlier this year. Pic: Supplied

Housing recovery strengthens in US

By Michael Fletcher

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

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

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

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

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

Home prices in Detroit were up 10pc in the past year, but they remained 20pc below 2000 levels. In Phoenix, where investors have brought new life to a market flooded with foreclosed houses and other



A home for sale in Glendale, California. Home prices in the US rose 4.3 percent in the year ending in October, showed Standard & Poor's Case-Shiller indexes. Pic: AFP

distressed properties, prices were up 21.7pc. In Miami, prices rose 8.5pc during the past year and they were up 8.4pc in the Las Vegas area.

The only housing markets

rise in new construction, a decline in once-swollen inventories and a fall in foreclosures. Taken together, the reports have led analysts to conclude that after years of being an economic drag,

"I would be surprised if we see any sustained price decreases in the near future. What we can expect is to see modest price appreciation, something in the neighbourhood of four

slowdown was explained as a necessary adjustment after the overbuilding that accompanied the housing boom. But the poor housing market persisted as the weak job market

new housing, they believe, but rock-bottom interest rates and slowly loosening credit standards also point to a better housing market, which would boost the economy.

"I think this is real. The crash is over and we're off and running," said Mark Zandi, chief economist for Moody's Analytics. "It may not be a straight line, but for the most part housing conditions should be on the upswing for the next three or four years."

Still, no one is predicting – nor do analysts desire – a return to the boom times that came before the crash. Inventories of foreclosed and other distressed properties, while declining, are still far above historic norms. Those properties will moderate overall prices as they make their way onto the market.

Also, some economists worry that the sharp price increases in once-devastated markets such as Phoenix and Las Vegas are a result of rampant speculation. They warn that investment activity may be inflating prices, particularly at the lower end of the market. If that is true, some areas could see short periods of flat prices or even declines in the near future, even if the longer-term trend is toward higher home values.

"What we are seeing is a lot of speculation" in some places, Baker said. "What is likely happening is that investors are coming in buying ahead of demand, even as vacancy rates are rising. It is exactly what happened during the bubble."

– The Washington Post

'I think this is real. The crash is over and we're off and running.'

tracked by the index that showed price declines were Chicago and New York City, each down by just over 1pc in the year ending in October.

The price increases in much of the country build on other data showing a sharp

housing is contributing to economic growth.

"I have no doubt that we have turned the corner," said Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, who closely tracks the housing market.

percent for the next several years."

The upturn is welcome news after sales were stuck near historic lows in the five years after the real estate bubble burst in 2006. Initially, the

discouraged people from looking for homes. At the same time, mortgage lenders significantly tightened credit.

But analysts think that cycle is reversing. Not only is there pent-up demand for

Best wishes for the Happy New Year 2013

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Every December, Phil Plait, an astronomer, lecturer and author, who writes for the US website, *Slate*, chooses his favourite outer space images of the year. His selection this year included this stunning image of a massive arch of material lifted off the Sun's surface by its magnetic field, on August 31. "Sometimes these arches collapse back down," wrote Plait, "but this one erupted, blasting literally hundreds of millions of tons of superheated plasma into space at a speed of 1400 kilometres a second (900 miles a second)... the arch was 300,000 kilometres (200,000 miles) across, 25 times larger than the Earth. Pic: NASA/GSFC/SDO.

A 'wonderful' breakthrough discovery

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

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

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

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

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

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

He was the first to suggest that a field of these particles could explain a nagging anomaly: Why do some particles have mass and why do others, such as light, have none?

That question was a gaping hole in the Standard Model, the conceptual framework for understanding the nuts-and-bolts particles and forces that constitute the cosmos.

CERN's announcement on July 4 stressed the need to confirm that the newcomer is the Higgs,

a margin of uncertainty that probably prevented the discovery from gaining a Nobel this year.

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

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

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

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

A Higgs-less Universe would thus be a terrifying thing.

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

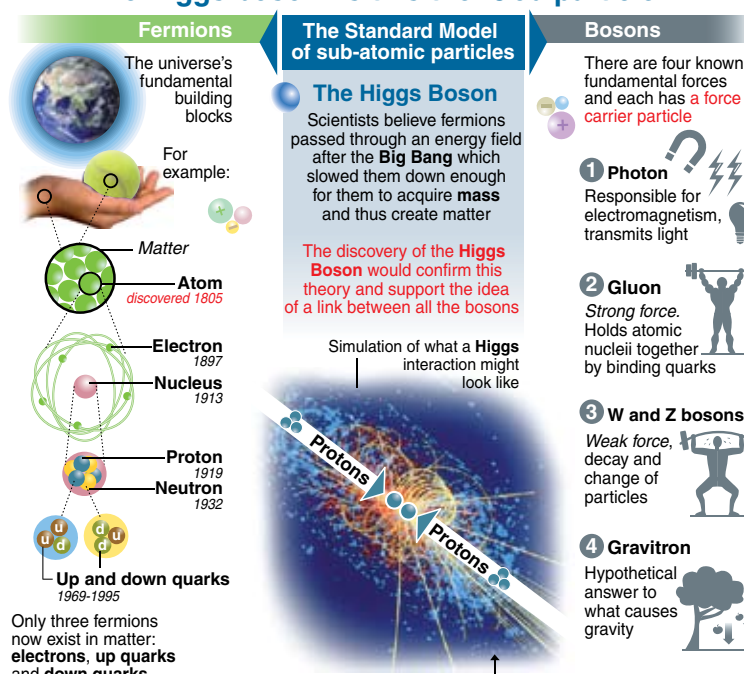
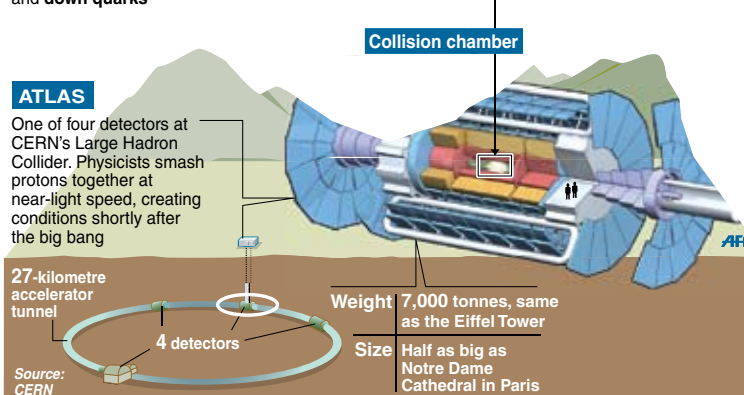
"Without the Higgs, there would be no stars and ultimately no life," said Themis Bowcock of Britain's University of Liverpool. "The Higgs offers humanity, for the first time, a unique glimpse into WHY nature is the way it is."

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

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

"Now, hydrogen is our rocket

The Higgs boson: is this the 'God particle'?



fuel," said Knight. "Who knows what purpose the Higgs will serve, but I don't think anyone in the 18th century would have predicted a line of causation from Cavendish's work to the first man on the Moon."

The hunt for the Higgs was an

extraordinary tale, exemplifying some of the best things in science.

It combined open debate based on evidence; fierce but friendly rivalries; and big-bucks experiments where teams threw themselves into the quest

unhampered by borders and nationalities, united by the common language of physics.

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

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

Ultimately the crown went to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), whose labs are enclosed in a giant circular tunnel straddling the French and Swiss borders.

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

Many challenges lie ahead in fundamental physics, said Gagnon.

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

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

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

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

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

– AFP

Russia issues warning of 'bloody chaos' in Syria

Briefly

WASHINGTON – US President Barack Obama cut short his Christmas holiday and returned to Washington on December 27 in a last ditch bid to reach agreement on preventing a “fiscal cliff”, in which hundreds of billions of dollars in tax hikes and deep spending cuts would take effect from January 1.

JOHANNESBURG – South Africa's first black president Nelson Mandela, 94, was convalescing at his Johannesburg home on December 27, a day after being discharged from hospital in Pretoria where he spent three weeks being treated for a lung infection.

JERUSALEM – Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas warned on December 27 that if there was no Israeli movement toward peace talks after Israel's elections on January 22 he will hand full responsibility for the occupied West Bank to the Israeli government.

MIAMI – Norman Schwarzkopf, the US general known as “Stormin Norman” who led Operation Desert Storm which liberated Kuwait from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in 1991, has died at the age of 78, a US official said on December 27.

– AFP

MOSCOW – Russia warned last week of “bloody chaos” in Syria should peace talks led by UN-Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi fail to end a 21 month conflict that has claimed an estimated 45,000 lives.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the United States and other players must redouble their efforts amid fading hopes for a political solution to the bloodshed.

“The alternative to a peaceful solution is bloody chaos. The longer it continues, the greater its scale – and the worse things get for all,” Lavrov told the *Interfax* news agency on December 27.

Lavrov's comments followed a meeting with a senior Syrian delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Muqdad.

Russia remains Syria's most important international ally and is one of the few nations to have unlimited access to President Bashar al-Assad's government.

Lavrov's meeting with the Syrians came as Brahimi wound down several days of talks in Damascus by calling for “real change” and

the quick introduction of a transition government “with all powers”.

Assad's government has still not responded to Brahimi's call. But the armed opposition immediately rejected any transition plan that would see either Assad or his immediate cohorts retain their positions of authority.

It is not immediately clear how Moscow intends to proceed. A foreign ministry spokesman had earlier rejected reports of a joint Russia-US peace initiative that would see Assad stay in power until 2014 while preventing him from further renewing his mandate.

Brahimi was to meet Lavrov in Moscow on December 29 in the hope of convincing Russia to do all it can to make sure that Assad accepts an accord that would gradually ease him from power.

Lavrov did not disclose the full details of his talks with the visiting Syrians.

But he conceded that hopes were fading for a Russian-backed initiative drafted in Geneva in June that made no explicit call on Assad to

step down – an alternative the ruling regime appeared to accept.

“Considering what is happening in Syria, the chances for such a solution based on the Geneva communique... are diminishing,” Lavrov told *Interfax*.

He said recent tri-party consultations that included Brahimi and US officials showed that chances of a peaceful solution based on the Geneva agreement “still exist”.

“We need coordinated action from all the parties, and they must speak in one voice,” Russia's top diplomat said.

Russia has always insisted it was not propping up Assad's regime but only pursuing a defence of international law that rejects foreign intervention in domestic disputes.

Lavrov announced earlier this month that Moscow had no intention of either asking Assad to step down or hosting the embattled Syrian leader should he decide to seek exile. – AFP

• Related Report P-27, 29



Pakistan People's Party supporters mark the fifth anniversary of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto at the family mausoleum in Sind province on December 27. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of Benazir and President Asif Ali Zardari, launched his political career at the event.



Jailed former Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak (above) was transferred to a military hospital on December 27 after his health deteriorated. His successor, President Mohamed Morsi, on December 26 hailed a controversial constitution approved in a referendum as marking a “new dawn” for the country.



Members of a Smiling Yoga club enjoy a workout while wearing Santa Claus costumes perform at a park in Hanoi on December 23. Pix: AFP

Zuma in doghouse over pet comments

JOHANNESBURG – South African president Jacob Zuma was ridiculed on December 27 after saying that owning a dog was not African and belonged to white culture.

Media quoted Zuma as saying that buying a dog and paying for veterinary care belonged to “white” culture. Zuma added that pet

ownership was part of a trend of black Africans trying to be white.

Criticism of Zuma littered social networking sites such as Twitter, where one user tweeted: “Zuma says owning dogs is un-African. Unlike those old African traditions of owning German cars, Italian suits, and Irish whisky.” – AFP

Gang-rape victim dies in S'pore

SINGAPORE – An Indian student whose savage gang-rape on a bus in New Delhi sparked mass protests across the country died on December 29 in a Singapore hospital after suffering severe organ failure.

As authorities braced for more unrest on the streets, police reinforcements could be seen fanning out across the centre of the Indian capital ahead of the return of the 23-year-old's body later on the same day.

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led the tributes to the victim but urged protesters to channel their anger constructively.

According to doctors in Singapore, the student lost her fight for life at 4:45am (2045 GMT), nearly two weeks after the brutal attack that horrified India.

“She had suffered from severe organ failure following serious injuries to her body and brain,” Kelvin Loh, the chief executive of Singapore's Mount Elizabeth Hospital, said in a statement.

“She was courageous in fighting for her life for so long against the odds but the trauma to her body was too severe for her to overcome.”

After boarding a bus

with tinted windows on December 16, the student was attacked by six drunk men who took it in turns to rape her and assaulted her with an iron bar before throwing her and her male companion off the moving vehicle.

She was airlifted to hospital in Singapore on December 27 – a move that drew criticism from some Indian doctors who claimed it was aimed at removing her from the country as protests over the attack escalated.

Singh said he was deeply saddened by the death and that protests sparked by the case were “understandable”.

“We have already seen the emotions and energies this incident has generated,” he wrote on his website. “These are perfectly understandable reactions from a young India and an India that genuinely desires change.”

Indian television news channels carried blanket coverage of the news, with the NDTV network running a ticker-tape headline “RIP India's Daughter”.

India's High Commissioner to Singapore TCA Raghavan told reporters that the woman's family was “shattered” by her death.

The decision to fly her out of India by air ambulance was taken at a meeting of Singh's cabinet on Wednesday and the government had promised to pay all her medical bills.

Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde said the government's only concern was to ensure the victim received “the best treatment possible”.

But Indian newspapers suggested the authorities, who have struggled to contain the nationwide protests over the attack, were keen to have her transferred out of the country.

Singh has ordered an official inquiry into the gang-rape and new laws to protect women as well as stiffer penalties for the worst sex crimes.

And he said Delhi police would soon launch a drive to recruit more female officers as a confidence-building measure.

The government has also announced plans to post the photos, names and addresses of convicted rapists on official websites to publicly shame them.

The campaign will begin in Delhi, which has been dubbed India's “rape capital”. — AFP

TO SHWE NAING-NGAN SEAFARERS AND MARITIME WORKERS

We the Seafarers Union of Burma/Myanmar which had been established since (1991) and accepted as its membership in (1993) by the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), would like to take this great opportunity to announce that our union is at present going to apply and register as a trade union in accordance with the Labour Organization Law (2011).

Therefore, we like to express our warmest welcome to all those seafarers and maritime workers who were, had been and are involved in the S.U.B-ITF activities outside and inside the country as well as to all who have interest in freedom of association and trade union so that you all can contact us through the following snail mail and physical address:-

PO BOX (686) Yangon 11181, Myanmar
No. (157) First Floor, Bo Aung Kyaw Street,
Kyauktada Township Yangon, Myanmar
Tel: +95 1 380357 Mobile: +95 9 421177700



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



The flashpoint issues of year ahead

WASHINGTON – Barack Obama is back and China has a new leader in Xi Jinping, but world leaders face heavyweight issues in 2013, from lingering economic crises to bloody tumult in the Middle East.

Economic crises in the United States and Europe

“No ‘foreign policy’ issue in 2013 will matter as much to global economic, political, and ultimately security conditions as whether the United States and Europe are able to deal with their economic crises,” Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote in *Global Ten: Challenges and Opportunities for the president in 2013*.

Unless a deal is reached between US President Obama and his Republican opponents by the end of 2012, the United States will plunge off the “fiscal cliff” – a toxic combination of tax hikes and spending cuts that could trigger another recession in the world’s biggest economy.

“If America’s political parties can agree on a way to climb down from the fiscal cliff, the resolution of the acute economic uncertainty that has gripped the country for the past 18 months would unleash private sector investment, spark an economic recovery, and give new capacity and weight to the country’s international role,” Mathews said.

As for Europe, “the challenge is still to summon sustained economic discipline and political will,” said the American expert. “The euro crisis morphed in 2012 from a life-threatening emergency to a chronic disease that will

be with us for years to come,” she said, warning countries such as France, Italy, Portugal and Spain of the need “to maintain the harsh treatment, avoid setbacks (in France, especially), and continue to inch toward restored growth.”

Eurozone GDP is forecast to contract by 0.3 percent in 2013, but Justin Vaisse, director of research on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution, said he believed that the worst of the euro crisis has passed. “The Americans and the markets have concluded that the euro will not explode, otherwise it would have fallen and there would have been a flight of capital,” he told AFP.

The French expert is worried, however, about the effects of the global slowdown on China.

Vaisse envisaged a gloomy scenario in which the euro area “cuts Chinese imports drastically due to a deeper than expected recession,” causing “political, social and geopolitical consequences in China.”

“China’s outgoing leadership, after years of stellar economic growth, could afford to allow growth to slow and politico-economic problems to accumulate. Xi cannot,” noted Mathews.

China and the territorial disputes with its neighbours

As tensions rise in the South China Sea, experts are increasingly fearful of an arms race or even armed conflict in the Asia-Pacific.

Seemingly innocuous territorial disputes over remote archipelagos could flare into military conflicts involving China, Japan and South Korea. The United

What to look out for in 2013



United States
Wash. D.C.
Investiture of Barack Obama for his second term in office as president
21 Jan



Israel
Parliamentary elections. The party of premier Benjamin Netanyahu is favourite to win
22 Jan



Jordan
Parliamentary elections, following the early dissolution of the assembly by the king
23 Jan



Italy
Parliamentary elections marked by the expected return of Silvio Berlusconi
Feb



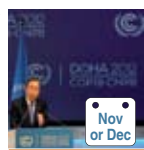
Kenya
General election. Polls in 2007 and 2008 degenerated into violence
March



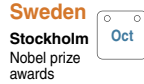
France
66th Cannes film festival
15-26 May



Los Angeles
85th Oscar ceremony
24 Feb



Poland
Warsaw
19th UN Climate Conference
Nov or Dec



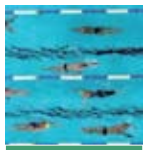
Sweden
Stockholm
Nobel prize awards
Oct



Germany
Parliamentary elections. Chancellor Angela Merkel is seeking a 3rd term
22 Sept



Russia
Moscow
World Athletics Championship
10-18 Aug



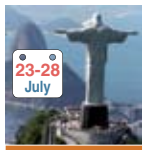
Spain
Barcelona
World Swimming Championships
19 July - 4 Aug



Tunisia
Presidential and parliamentary elections
23 June 7 July



Northern Ireland
G8 summit
17-18 June



Rio de Janeiro
World Youth Day, attended by Pope Benedict XVI
23-28 July



Pakistan
Parliamentary elections, a major test for democracy in the country
May



Iran
Presidential election to find a successor to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
14 June



Brazil
Football: The Confederations Cup, a rehearsal for the 2014 World Cup
15-30 June

States has a military alliance with Japan but has so far refused to take sides.

China’s “neighbours look at the US as the distant

balancer, the country that to some degrees balances the military and the political power of China, which would otherwise have an

easier time in completely dominating the region,” said former US secretary of defence Harold Brown, a counsellor for the Center for

A popular uprising escalates into a fully-fledged war

ATME, Syria – Syria’s uprising has shifted from popular street protests against President Bashar al-Assad to a full-fledged war, increasingly influenced by armed Islamists, in a far cry from the idealism of the Arab Spring.

The fervour born in March 2011 for democratic reforms still runs high, but the initial peaceful protests against Assad’s regime have been overtaken by the government forces’ brutal crackdown.

Backed by the country’s Sunni Muslim majority against Assad, whose Alawite faith stems from Shiite Islam, the rebels launched the battle with arms smuggled into Syria, collected by defectors or bought from corrupt army officers.

Now more than 21 months into the revolt, the insurgents control large swathes of rural territory as well as a number of medium-sized towns.

In northwest Syria, they hold sway from Aleppo all the way to the Turkish border, although the metropolis itself remains the scene of endless street-to-street clashes.

After advances in the country’s oil-rich but mainly desert east, the battle lines have neared Damascus where the regime is battling to “secure” the capital’s province against what it brands foreign-



Rebel fighters in Aleppo on December 21. Fighting for control of the city has raged since July. Pic: AFP

backed “terrorists.”

Sheikh Tawfiq, a powerful Islamist commander in the Aleppo region, is convinced Assad’s regime is weakening by the day and that it is “the beginning of the end.”

Having failed to recover lost ground, the regime’s military strategy has switched to defending the capital, major cities, strategic main roads and the Alawite heartland on the Mediterranean coast.

Government forces pound rebel-held villages and town districts,

apparently regardless of civilian casualties.

On October 18, a bomb dropped by a MiG warplane on an apartment building in the central town of Maaret al-Numan killed more than 40 people, including 22 children, crushed under the rubble, as witnessed by AFP.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has tirelessly documented the bloodshed, says more than 42,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since the uprising began.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been displaced or forced into exile from villages such as Atme where they wait to cross a barbed wire barrier into Turkey.

The international community, meanwhile, has been reduced to an observer, stumped by divisions within the UN Security Council. Despite mounting diplomatic pressure, Assad has been able to count on the support of both Russia and Iran.

War-hardened, the rebels have also been strengthened by hundreds of foreign volunteers pouring in from Turkey, which openly calls for Assad’s fall.

But the past six months have been marked by a growing Islamisation of the conflict as Al-Nusra Front, suspected of ties to Al-Qaeda, takes a prominent role in the battle for Syria.

Al-Nusra has become active on all the front lines, threatening a takeover of the revolution.

Disciplined and battle-hardened, they are often contrasted with the allegedly “corrupt” revolutionaries in the form of some commanders of the mainstream Free Syrian Army battalions made up mostly of army defectors.

On December 10, rebels led by Al-Nusra seized Sheikh Suleiman base west of Aleppo. A video posted online showed fighters linked to Al-Nusra standing before black

flags and reciting the Muslim profession of faith inside the abandoned base.

Most FSA members are Syrians, but Al-Nusra has attracted jihadists from across the Muslim world. Their hatred of “non-believers” combined with the regime’s fight-to-the-death mentality adds fuel to the civil war.

The Syrian military, with its vast superiority and control of the skies, is still capable of mounting major operations, although its possible last-resort use of chemical weapons is stirring rising international concern.

In what could prove to be a turning point, AFP saw the shooting down of two aircraft in as many days near Darret Ezza in the northwest in late November with surface-to-air missiles which rebels say they seized from the army.

The insurgents say they have light weapons and ammunition as well as communications equipment, but that they still need more sophisticated offensive arms.

Their strategy, in the face of the regular army, the mukhabarat intelligence services and pro-regime “shabiha” militia, has been refined into one of cutting supply lines, choking off large urban centres and besieging isolated garrisons. – AFP

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Pope urges end to bloodshed in Christmas message

VATICAN CITY – The leader of the world's Roman Catholics last week called for an "end to the bloodshed" in Syria and denounced the "savage" violence in Africa, even as news came in of a Christmas attack on Christians in Nigeria.

Speaking in his traditional Christmas message on December 25, Pope Benedict XVI, 85, touched on several other of the world's conflict zones.

A capacity crowd of 40,000 pilgrims filled the vast St Peter's Square to hear the

pope deliver the "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and the World) message.

Speaking from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica, the pope called for a return of peace in Nigeria, where he said "savage acts of terrorism continue to reap victims, particularly among Christians."

But even as he spoke, news was emerging of a deadly Christmas Eve attack there.

Gunmen attacked a church in the northern state of Yobe during a Christmas Eve service, residents and

police said, killing six people including the pastor, before setting the building ablaze.

The pope also said: "There is hope in the world... even at the most difficult times and in the most difficult situations."

He prayed for peace in Syria, whose people have been "deeply wounded and divided by a conflict which does not spare even the defenceless and reaps innocent victims."

In a message watched by millions around the world, he called "for an end to the

bloodshed... and dialogue in the pursuit of a political solution to the conflict."

His wide-ranging speech called for peace in the Middle East and appealed to the new leadership in China to respect religious freedom there.

At the midnight mass in Bethlehem, the most senior Roman Catholic bishop in the Middle East issued a special call for efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Only justice and peace in the Holy Land can reestablish balance and stability in the

region and in the world," Patriarch Fuad Twal told worshippers in the West Bank city, the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

"From this holy place, I invite politicians and men of good will to work with determination for peace and reconciliation that encompasses Palestine and Israel in the midst of all the sufferings in the Middle East," Twal said.

The outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury, in his final Christmas Day sermon, acknowledged that last

month's failure by England's state church to approve women bishops had been "deeply painful".

The decision had damaged the church's reputation, Rowan Williams, who steps down at the end of the year, said from Canterbury Cathedral in southeast England.

The liberal Williams, head of the world's 80 million Anglicans, fought over the last decade to bridge the divide between with the church's traditionalists.

– AFP

Syrians 'losing hope', says UN aid official

UNITED NATIONS – The United Nations warned on December 25 that Syrians are "losing hope" as war worsens in their country, with prospects of a diplomatic end now at rock bottom, and international aid is cut.

Peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi's latest talks with Syria's President Bashar al-Assad produced no sign of a willingness to negotiate, diplomats said, and there are mounting warnings of a sectarian war taking over the uprising against Assad.

The United Nations has had to cut food rations it provides to 1.5 million Syrians because of cash shortages, and John Ging, a top UN relief official, said: "The humanitarian community in Syria is struggling."

With four million people in need inside the country and well over 500,000 registered as refugees outside, "it's becoming more and more difficult just to do the very basic things to help people to survive," said Ging, director of operations for the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

"People are losing hope because they just see more violence on the horizon, they just see a deterioration," he added.

With existing appeals already barely 50 percent funded, the UN has launched a drive to raise US\$1.5 billion for next year.

With the death toll estimated at more than 44,000 by Syrian activists and another grim winter setting in, hopes of a diplomatic

Strike on bakery kills 60

DAMASCUS – More than 60 people were killed in a regime air strike on a bakery in a rebel-held town on December 23, monitors said.

In one of the deadliest incidents of the conflict, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the strike hit a bakery in Halfaya in the central province of Hama, killing more than 60 people and wounding at least 50.

"In Halfaya, regime forces bombarded a bakery and committed a massacre that killed dozens of people, including women and children, and wounded many others," said the Local Coordination Committees, a grassroots

network of activists.

"A MiG(jet) has attacked! Look at (President Bashar al-) Assad's weapons. Look, world, look at the Halfaya massacre," says an unidentified cameraman shooting an amateur video distributed by the Observatory.

The footage showed a bombed one-storey block and a crater in the road.

Bloodied bodies lay on the road, while others could be seen in the rubble. Another of the bloodiest attacks in the Syrian conflict was on a bread line in the Qadi Askar district of Aleppo on August 16 that left 60 people dead, showed hospital records.

– AFP

solution to the conflict are virtually non-existent.

"We do not see any prospect of any end of violence or any prospect of political dialogue to start," UN leader Ban Ki-moon said ahead of Brahimi's latest trip to Damascus last week which produced little sign of a change of heart.

"Assad appears to have stonewalled Brahimi again, the UN Security Council is not even close to showing the envoy the kind of support he needs and the rebels will not now compromise," said a UN council diplomat.

Russia and China have vetoed three attempted Security Council resolutions seeking to force Assad's hand

with just a threat of sanctions. Western nations say there is now no point in coming back on the UN path.

Ban is now leading growing UN warnings that the change in the 21-month-old conflict could see "sectarian atrocities".

"There is a growing risk that civilian communities, including Alawite and other minorities perceived to be associated with the government, its security forces, militias and allies, could be subject to large scale reprisal attacks," said Adama Dieng, the UN special representative on the prevention of genocide.

– AFP



A member of the 'Berliner Seehunde' (Berlin seals) swimming club takes a chilly dip in Berlin's Oranienburger lake during its traditional Christmas Day dip on December 25. Pic: AFP

Cold snap in Russia kills scores

MOSCOW – A bitter cold snap in Russia has claimed 123 lives in the previous 10 days, an official said on December 25, with the early freeze testing authorities in a country used to notoriously tough winters.

Temperatures have plunged as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 degrees Fahrenheit) in the Moscow region and minus 60 degrees Celsius (minus 76 degrees Fahrenheit) in Eastern Siberia.

"Since the start of the

cold, 123 people have died of exposure and frostbite," a medical source was quoted by the *Interfax* news agency as saying.

Another 833 people had to be hospitalised to be treated for hypothermia and frostbite, the source added.

State television reports on December 25 focused on the village of Khovu Aksy in Tyva, one of Russia's poorest regions in southern Siberia. A state of emergency was declared there after a power station failed as temperatures

hovered around minus 40 degrees Celsius, affecting 4000 residents.

Temperatures have been about 12 degrees Celsius lower than seasonal norms in Russia, where the coldest weather usually does not arrive until January or February.

In the Moscow region, December 24 set a record for electricity consumption, Russia's power operator said the next day, blaming the unusually cold temperatures.

Monti wants to block Berlusconi comeback, say analysts

ROME – Mario Monti's offer to stay on as Italian prime minister is motivated by a wish to prevent the scandal-tainted Silvio Berlusconi from returning to power and undoing key reforms, analysts said on December 24.

"Berlusconi is the number one adversary. Monti's objective is in part a clear attempt to destroy him politically," Stefano Folli, political commentator for *Il Sole 24 Ore* newspaper, told AFP.

The outgoing premier, who resigned on December 21 after 13 months at the head of an unelected team of technocrats to take the helm of a caretaker government, said on December 23 that he would consider leading a pro-reform coalition in elections set for February 24-25 – though not as a formal candidate.

He cannot officially run in the polls as he is already a senator for life, but under Italy's electoral system he can join the campaign, add

his name to ballot lists and be asked to lead the country by whoever wins.

"Monti has thrown his hat into the ring because he wants to stop Berlusconi and he does not think the centre-left could get enough votes for a majority," said Roberto D'Alimonte, politics professor at the Luiss University in Rome.

While opinion polls had previously tipped former communist Democratic Party leader Pier Luigi Bersani to win, Monti's

announcement could turn the election into a nail-biting three-way race.

Monti, 69, said on December 23 that he would be ready to lead those who agree with his proposals to "change Italy and reform Europe".

"He wants to be a guiding star, leading everyone up the only path for Italy" where the threat of the eurozone debt crisis remains, said Valentino Parlato, the founder of the radical left-wing *Manifesto* daily.

Monti's speech on December 23 was a direct challenge to Berlusconi, who has launched his sixth election campaign in two decades and hopes to become prime minister for a fourth time.

The conservative media tycoon, who is appealing against an October conviction for tax fraud and is on trial for having sex with an underage prostitute, had made proposals including the abolition of a new property tax that Monti

called "very dangerous and illusory".

Franco Pavoncello, professor of politics at the John Cabot American University in Rome, called Monti's descent into the political fray "inevitable".

"It was an act of conscience, driven by serious concerns that the reforms carried out this year are at risk under a new government, and a desire to avoid the age-old campaign between Silvio Berlusconi and the centre-left," he said. – AFP

A life in training for Kerry's next role

ANALYSIS
by Albert Hunt

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

Senator John Kerry, 69, who has been tapped by President Barack Obama to succeed Hillary Clinton, checks off all those boxes. He has been an engaged diplomat, a successful politician with gravitas and a decorated combat veteran.

Much of his 28-year Senate career has focused on national security. He was among the few young Americans of privilege who fought in Vietnam. Like Clinton, though unlike most modern-day secretaries of state, he understands how US politics affects foreign policy on issues from the Middle East to China. The Massachusetts Democrat has won six statewide races. He knows how Washington works.

“Senator Kerry was the most prominent choice of most people on both sides of the political aisle,” said Senator Richard Lugar, an Indiana Republican who has worked with his Democratic colleague for years.

As the Democratic nominee in 2004, Kerry lost a close race to President George



Senator John Kerry speaks on the final day of the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, on September 6. President Barack Obama on December 21 nominated Kerry to replace Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State. Pic: AFP

W. Bush. That experience is central to the Kerry of today. A tough public rejection lessens many politicians, who become obsessed with might-have-beens. After a fairly short pout, Kerry bounced back to become a more formidable senator.

The issue that bedeviled him throughout that campaign was his vote

and Afghanistan and will be a voice for negotiation, more than confrontation, with Iran. On most issues, his views are very much in sync with those of the president. On occasion, the administration has followed the Kerry approach: He pressured a reluctant White House to impose a no-fly zone to topple the Libyan

US could work with the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad; at the same time, he is respected by leading Israeli and Egyptian political figures.

“John Kerry is a terrific choice,” said Zbigniew Brzezinski, the national security adviser in the Carter administration. “He brings a wide range of experience, has

support for measures including one that shifted US aid to Pakistan from predominately military support to include more civil assistance.

In 2010, prospects for a nuclear arms-reduction treaty were considered dim; Republicans were strongly opposed and had little interest in giving Obama another

where, observers say, he deftly handled difficult leaders. Two decades earlier, he and Senator John McCain, a Republican from Arizona and a fellow Vietnam War veteran, orchestrated the normalisation of relations with Vietnam.

The son of a Foreign Service officer – “John’s entire life has prepared him for this role,” the president said in naming him – Kerry will fit in comfortably at the State Department. He will encounter challenges; inevitably, he will be compared to Hillary Clinton, a rock star around the globe.

Moreover, as with Clinton, there will be carping by some anonymous aides in the White House who believe the secretary of state should travel the world while they make policy. The Kerry-Obama relationship is good. It was Kerry, as the party’s nominee in 2004, who picked Obama as the convention keynote speaker, his debut on the national stage. They aren’t close; this president doesn’t forge close relations with fellow politicians. The new secretary of state should try to recruit an Obama confidant, such as the deputy White House economic adviser Mike

Froman, as a top deputy.

Kerry tends to play things close to the vest, a better trait for a senator than for the country’s top diplomat.

And he still is seen as an elitist, a bit awkward and aloof, a rap that Bush pinned on him in 2004 that has some merit. – *Bloomberg News* (Albert Hunt is a Bloomberg View columnist).

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

for the Iraq War; his staff convinced him that to oppose it in 2002 would have been suicidal to his presidential ambitions. His attempts to gloss over that decision during the presidential race backfired.

He has supported Obama’s policies on Iraq

dictator Moamar Kadhafi and to call for the removal of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.

Kerry has met many world leaders, developing a reputation as both a good listener and analyst; an exception was his sense not too long ago that the

dealt with foreign leaders and has a basic strategic sense of what needs to be done as well as what should not be done.”

The lawmaker has been the activist chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee since 2009, fashioning bipartisan

victory. Kerry persevered, ultimately picking up enough Republican support to comfortably clear the two-thirds vote required for ratification.

He has played an important troubleshooting role for the Obama administration in Afghanistan and Pakistan,

Romney was reluctant candidate, reveals son

WASHINGTON – No one wanted to be president less than Mitt Romney, his son said in an interview published on December 23 that raises new questions about the candidacy of the losing Republican nominee.

In an interview with the *Boston Globe* examining what went wrong with the Romney campaign, his eldest son Tagg said his father had been a reluctant candidate from the start.

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

“He wanted to be president less than anyone I’ve met in my life. He had no desire... to run,” Tagg Romney said. “If he could have found someone else to take his place... he would have been ecstatic to step aside.”

Romney, a former Massachusetts governor and multi-billionaire businessman, has been widely criticised for blaming his loss in the November 6 election on President Barack Obama’s “gifts” to Latinos,

women and the poor.

“What the president’s campaign did was focus on certain members of his base coalition, give them extraordinary financial gifts from the government, and then work very aggressively to turn them out to vote,” Romney said in mid-November in his first public reaction to his election loss.

The *Globe* story sought to look beyond that narrative and examine what really went wrong.

It focused on the fact that Romney was unhappy that one of his most trusted advisers, Mike Murphy – the architect of his successful 2002 run for governor of Massachusetts – did not join the campaign.

The *Globe* story also highlighted the decision to downplay Romney’s biography in favour of going after Obama and the flagging US economy.

Campaign strategists feared that highlighting Romney’s biography would open the Mormon candidate up more to personal attacks that he was wealthy, out-of-touch and belonged to a minority faith.

– AFP

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6000 will not be enough, Mr President

COMMENT by Max Boot

THE Obama administration appears determined to leave Afghanistan as fast as possible. If the latest leaks are to be believed, officials are willing to leave as few as 6000 US troops behind after 2014, concentrated at the Bagram air base and a few other installations around Kabul. The mind boggles at what this would mean in military terms.

Consider one simple fact: Kandahar, the city where the Taliban movement started, is 500 kilometres (310 miles) southwest of Kabul.

Imagine that intelligence analysts have identified a "high-value target" – say, a terrorist facilitator with links to both al-Qaeda and the Taliban – in Kandahar. How would the US military capture or kill him without a secure base in Kandahar?

This scenario is, on some level, fanciful, because the lack of a US presence on the ground around Kandahar would make it difficult to generate useful intelligence. How would the CIA or the Defence Intelligence Agency run agents or even operate drones? Even assuming that the intelligence could be garnered, it would be exceedingly hard to act on the information.

A SEAL or Delta Force team typically reaches its target by helicopter. But Kandahar is a two-hour helicopter flight from Kabul and a fully loaded Blackhawk would need to refuel to make the round trip. Assuming there is no US base in Kandahar, this would require aerial refueling, which is difficult and costly and would not necessarily be available around the clock. Given the long flight time,



US troops enjoy a special Christmas Day meal at Kabul International Airport on December 25. A drawdown to about 6000 US troops after most the American 68,000 military personnel are withdrawn by the end of 2014 would increase the risk of a Taliban takeover, writes Max Boot. Pic: AFP

there is a good chance that by the time the commandos arrived, the target would have moved on.

It is doubtful that such a force would be dispatched in the first place, however, because commanders would be reluctant to send special operators into high-risk situations without having quick-reaction forces standing by to rescue them in the event of trouble. US generals would not feel comfortable entrusting the lives of these elite operators to Afghan army forces, especially in light of the well-advertised problem of Taliban infiltrators, so they would probably not order the mission in the first place.

That would leave only one

way to attack a terrorist kingpin in Kandahar: from the air, with either an armed Predator or a manned aircraft such as an F-16. Yet the ability to keep either kind of aerial platform over Kandahar would be severely limited by the need to fly a 1000 kilometre (600 mile) round-trip from Bagram simply to arrive on station.

So there would probably be a considerable time lag simply to drop a bomb, which again raises the risk of missing the target.

Relying on air power carries other risks, such as the potential for collateral damage, which can create more enemies than missions eliminate. Aerial attacks on wedding parties and the like

were especially common in Afghanistan before the troop surge started in 2009. Without forward air controllers to call in air strikes, the possibility of errors goes up.

Another problem with air power is that it precludes the possibility of interrogating suspects and examining their computers and paperwork – one of the best sources of intelligence about terrorist machinations. The Joint Special Operations Command, composed of the top-tier special operators, has become such an effective man-hunting machine precisely because it has become so proficient at "sensitive site exploitation" and interrogation of detainees,

sometimes leading to fresh missions being launched the night before a detainee's confederates are even aware that he has been taken into custody. That will become impossible under the planned drawdown.

All in all, limiting the US presence to 6000 or so troops in Bagram and Kabul would be a major counterterrorism setback. It would also have a deleterious impact on the combat effectiveness of the Afghan army and police.

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

"enablers." The Defence Department's recent *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* noted that only one of 23 Afghan army brigades is able to operate without coalition help. The report also "anticipates that the [Afghan army] will continue to require assistance with logistics and acquisition processes beyond December 2014."

Afghanistan is not expected to have a functioning air force before 2017, so Afghan forces will remain especially dependent on US help for air support and aerial medevac. But it is doubtful that US commanders would call in airstrikes without having US advisers embedded with Afghan units – and under the rumoured plan, no such advisers will be available. Afghan security forces will be on their own to face an entrenched insurgency, which has been degraded by the surge but remains a major threat in southern and eastern Afghanistan, thanks in no small measure to its havens in Pakistan.

It is hard to imagine how anyone in the Obama administration could conclude that a force of just 6000 personnel would be sufficient after 2014 when, even with 68,000 troops deployed in Afghanistan today, the United States cannot prevent the Taliban and Haqqanis from operating openly an hour's drive from Kabul. Such a precipitous drawdown vastly increases the risk of a Taliban takeover.

– *The Washington Post*

(Max Boot is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of the forthcoming book, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present*).

Japan's new PM faces diplomatic, economic challenges

TOKYO – Japan's new premier faces a long to-do list, including mending ties with Asian neighbours and reviving a limp economy that bedevilled previous governments, analysts say.

High on the agenda for Shinzo Abe will be addressing prickly relations with China and South Korea, which greeted his rise to power with alarm after a series of hardline comments on territorial disputes and a conservative position on sensitive issues linked to Japan's imperialist past.

Tokyo is embroiled in bitter rows over separate island chains claimed by Beijing and Seoul, which have raised their eyebrows at Abe's musings about revising Japan's post-World War II pacifist constitution.

However Abe, 58, who has been premier before, is unlikely to follow through on his hard-right rhetoric at least until he solidifies his power base after elections in Japan's upper house of parliament in 2013, said Jiro Yamaguchi, a politics professor at Hokkaido University.

Abe botched the diplomatic file during his lacklustre 2006-2007 tenure in Japan's top political job, sparking controversy by saying he wanted to review the country's previous admissions over the touchy

issue of wartime sex slavery.

He argued there was no evidence Japan's imperial army directly coerced thousands of so-called "comfort women" into brothels throughout Asia during World War II, prompting a call from US lawmakers for a fresh apology from Tokyo.

Abe quickly backpedalled, saying he supported Japan's landmark 1993 apology over the comfort women issue, expressing similar sympathies during a visit to the United States five years ago.

"If he makes those kinds of gaffes again by professing his conservative beliefs, Japan would be isolated from the rest of the world," said Yamaguchi, a former key policy advisor for the centre-left Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which was booted from power in the national elections in December.

"Voters didn't give him a mandate to pursue his conservative policy agenda but they wanted to punish the DPJ for its various policy failures," he added.

But even Abe admitted that the victory – based largely on promises to inject life into Japan's moribund economy while getting tough on diplomacy – was far from a resounding show of support for his LDP.

Shinzo Abe

Installed as prime minister on Wednesday



58 years old

- Elected to parliament for the first time in 1993
- Becomes prime minister in 2006, resigning a year later because of defeat in parliament
- Leads Liberal-Democrats and obtained absolute majority in chamber of deputies Dec.16
- ▶ A conservative, he promises to improve relations with China and build a strong and prosperous Japan

AFP

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

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

"The DPJ failed to realise its own election pledge for social equality and improving peoples' quality of life as the gap between rich and poor widened," said Shigeki Uno, a professor of political thought at Tokyo University.

The world's third-largest economy has been hit hard by financial turmoil in Europe, an export-sapping strong yen and a diplomatic row with China that weighed on trade, dousing hopes Japan had cemented a recovery after last year's disasters.

Tokyo is also grappling with a public debt that is more than double gross domestic product, the worst in the industrialised world and a debt mountain that keeps growing as a rapidly ageing population leans on the social security system.

Abe pledged to boost Japan's fortunes by pressing the central bank to take more aggressive monetary policy measures while promising a huge government spending package worth about US\$118 billion.

The prime minister-elect met the head of the Bank of Japan on December 18, calling on him to strike a policy deal with government.

Two days later, the BoJ announced fresh monetary easing measures, a move widely seen as stoked by

comments from Abe who appeared to challenge the central bank's independence.

However, Abe's prescription to cure Japan's woes has been dismissed by some economists as likely to worsen the fiscal situation while doing little to boost growth, especially if the money disappears into white elephant projects.

Another key challenge for the new administration is whether to embrace or reject the pork-barrel politics honed under successive LDP regimes, said Hiroshi Hirano, politics professor at Gakushuin University.

Joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a regional free trade deal that has sparked ire in the protected agricultural sector among others, would help force long sought structural change in Japan's economy, Hirano said.

"Japan needs a truly functioning growth strategy that prompts industrial sector restructuring," he said.

"But this would collide with demands from vested interest groups.

"If the LDP wants to address the needs of these traditional support groups by spending on infrastructure, for example, it has to show it has the bankroll." – AFP



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Outcry in Cambodia as two jailed over union boss murder

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

Chea Vichea, a vocal critic of Prime Minister Hun Sen's government, was gunned down in broad daylight at a newsstand in the capital Phnom Penh – a killing decried by activists as an attempt to silence his labour union.

Days later, Born Samnang, now 32, and Sok Sam Oeun, 43, were arrested and jailed for 20 years each in a verdict which rights watchdogs said

was based on insufficient evidence.

In 2008 the Supreme Court provisionally released the pair and ordered a retrial. But the Appeal Court ruled on December 27 that there was sufficient proof of their guilt and confirmed the 20-year sentences.

Am Sam Ath, of Cambodian rights groups Licadho, said the pair appeared to be innocent victims. "Civil groups still consider the two men as the artificial killers," he told reporters.

The pair shouted "unjust" and called for help from the king and Hun Sen as they were led from the court in handcuffs

and taken to prison.

"Let me go. I am not the killer," said Born Samnang.

Sok Sam Oeun's wife, Neang Heng, told reporters her husband had been "full of hope" that he would be acquitted.

The pair's lawyers immediately appealed against the ruling, which rights activists said had again failed to deliver justice.

"I am very shocked and disappointed at the lack of independence of the court and at the inability of the court to provide justice in the case," the president of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, Ou Virak, told AFP.

Police alleged at the time that

the two men were promised US\$5000 to carry out the killing. The pair have denied any involvement and said they were framed by a group of police.

Former Phnom Penh police chief Heng Pov, who led the investigation but was himself later jailed on various charges he contended were politically motivated, has also said the two did not kill Chea Vichea.

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

– AFP



Born Samnang is bundled out of the court after losing his appeal on December 27. Pic: AFP

Beijing urges PM Abe to meet 'halfway'

BEIJING – China called on new Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last week to meet Beijing "halfway" to try and improve relations that have been hurt by a debilitating territorial dispute.

"We hope the new Japanese administration will meet the Chinese side halfway and make concrete efforts to overcome difficulties in bilateral relations," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters on December 26.

She added such efforts were needed "so as to push bilateral relations back on to the normal track of development".

Hua was speaking after Abe was selected as Japan's prime minister by the lower house of parliament after victory by his Liberal Democratic Party in elections earlier this month.

"We are ready to work with the Japanese side to push forward the steady and sound development of bilateral relations," Hua said.

China and Japan are at odds over small islands in the East China Sea that both claim, though Japan controls.

Hua reiterated China's position on the dispute, calling the islands "China's inherent territory," while adding that Beijing wants to resolve the dispute "through dialogue and negotiation."

"The pressing task for Japan now is to show sincerity and take concrete actions to overcome the current situation and improve bilateral relations."

Separately, China's state-run Xinhua news agency carried a commentary expressing hope that Abe's election could herald the beginning of better relations.

"It is hoped that Abe... could view Japan-China ties from a long-term and overall perspective and steer Tokyo's diplomacy toward the consolidation of regional peace and stability," the commentary said. – AFP

China sets new milestone in rail travel

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

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

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

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

State media have reported that December 26 was chosen to start the Beijing-Guangzhou service to commemorate the birth in 1893 of late Chinese leader Mao Zedong.

The Beijing-Guangzhou route was made possible with the completion of a line between Zhengzhou



Train stewardesses at Beijing West station on December 26 ahead of the high-speed train's inaugural passenger journey to Guangzhou. Pic: AFP

and Beijing. High-speed sections linking Zhengzhou and Wuhan and Wuhan and Guangzhou were already in service.

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

Airlines reportedly scrambled to compete with

the new service, offering discounted one-way fares as low as 460 yuan between the cities on December 26.

China's high-speed rail network was only established in 2007 but has fast become the world's largest. The state-run Xinhua news agency said China operates 9300 kilometres of high-speed railways.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Woman in 'insider' attack

KABUL – A female Afghan police officer shot dead a NATO civilian adviser inside Kabul police headquarters on December 24, officials said, in the first "insider" attack by a woman.

It was the latest in a series of such attacks that have seriously undermined trust between NATO forces and their Afghan allies in the fight against hardline Islamist Taliban insurgents.

A spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said the adviser died of his wounds and the female police officer who shot him had been detained.

In another insider attack on December 24, the head of a police post in the northern province of Jawzjan shot dead five of his colleagues and fled to join the Taliban, said provincial police chief Abdul Aziz Ghairat.

Interior ministry spokesman Sediq Seidiqqi

confirmed the Kabul incident and said an investigation was under way, while a senior security official speaking to AFP anonymously said the victim was a male adviser from NATO.

A US military official said on condition of anonymity that the adviser was American. A different official said he worked for DynCorp, a private security contractor.

The Afghan conflict has seen a surge in insider attacks this year, with more than 50 ISAF soldiers killed by their colleagues in the Afghan army or police, though most have happened on military bases and not in the capital.

NATO says about a quarter of insider attacks are caused by Taliban infiltrators, but the rest stem from personal animosities and cultural differences between Western troops and their Afghan allies. – AFP

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Dated: 31 December 2012

Pillaging nature to cultivate oil palm

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

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

They have been replaced by plantations that are too nutrient-poor to support such wildlife, instead dedicated solely to producing fruit that is pulped to make oil used globally in products ranging from food to fuel.

A palm oil tree can yield useable fruit in three years and continue doing so for the next 25 years. But such wealth creation has meant environmental destruction.

“We don’t see too many orangutans any more”, said a worker with a weather-beaten face, taking a break in the shade of a hut built on a path gouged out of the forest floor.

Experts believe there are about 50,000 to 60,000 orangutans left in the wild, 80 percent of them in Indonesia’s Borneo and the rest in Malaysia. Exact data on their decline is hard to come by, say primatologists.

“What we see now is a contest between orangutans and palm oil for a home,” said Sri Suci Utami Atmoko from National University in Jakarta.

“You can judge that the population is depleting from the loss of orangutan habitats.”

Gibbons, often recognisable by the rings of white fur that frame their faces, are among the hardest-hit species.

“There are 100,000 gibbons in Borneo. But in 15-20 years, there will be more viable populations,” said Aurelien Brule, a French national based in Borneo for 15 years who runs an animal sanctuary.

Gibbons rescued from the



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

destruction of their forest homes cannot be returned alone into new wild habitats. “Other pairs protecting their own territory would kill them,” said Brule, adding that rampant deforestation has wiped out sites suitable for single animals.

indigenous peoples alliance, said there is no exact data but recorded cases of land conflict are in the hundreds, with thousands of people possibly affected.

“Palm oil has brought fortune to Indonesia, but it has been gained with blood,” said Jakarta-based

(680,000 acres) in the 1980s to 7.32 million hectares in 2009, government documents show.

The industry has helped push Indonesia’s GDP growth rate above 6.0 percent every year since 2005, but at the cost of huge tracts of rainforest.

‘Palm oil has brought fortune to Indonesia, but it has been gained with blood.’

There is also a human cost, with the permits for plantations resulting in the eviction of indigenous people.

Abdon Nababan, the secretary general of AMAN, an Indonesian

forest campaigner for Greenpeace, Wirendro Sumargo.

Indonesia, the world’s biggest palm oil producer, has exponentially increased the land dedicated to the commodity from 274,000 hectares

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

Despite some backlash around the world, including an unsuccessful attempt in France to push an amendment to quadruple tax on palm oil to discourage consumption – the destruction is unlikely to stop any time soon.

Indonesia, which together with Malaysia holds 85pc of the market, aims to increase production more than 60pc by 2020.

To appease environmental concerns, it last year imposed a moratorium on new permits in primary forests and peatlands. But critics say it is a cosmetic move, with plantations overlapping sensitive environments.

One example can be found in the Tripa Peat Swamp Forest, in the northwest of Aceh province, home to endangered species such as Sumatran rhinos and tigers.

In this area, “we have evidence that five palm oil firms are doing illegal practices”, said Deddy Ratih, forest campaigner for WALHI/ Friends of the Earth Indonesia.

Derom Bangun, the chairman of umbrella organisation the Indonesian Palm Oil Board, does not deny the issue but says improvements are being made.

“The government has seen (the violations) and has taken steps to fix it. Ultimately we want the palm oil industry to work according to the rules,” he added.

In an effort to improve their image, some palm oil firms have joined the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), a forum consisted namely of green groups and growers.

The WWF, one of the founders of RSPO, admitted that there is still a conservation shortfall.

“Generally land allocation for plantations still overlaps with primary forests and peatlands, including in areas that are the habitat of key species,” said Irwan Gunawan, WWF deputy director of market transformation in Indonesia.

“We are encouraging the government to pay attention to this,” he added. – AFP

Indomitable acid attack victim wins praise, and R2.5m

NEW DELHI – When Sonali Mukherjee spurned the advances of three of her fellow students, they responded by melting her face with acid.

But rather than hide herself away, the 27-year-old applied to appear on India’s most-watched TV quiz show – and walked away a rupee millionaire.

“If you can stare at a picture of a pretty woman then you can look at my burnt face too,” Mukherjee told AFP in her tiny home in the capital, New Delhi.

“It’s very easy for victims of acid attacks to swallow poison but I made the choice to stand up and scream and shout against the violence.”

The recent gang-rape of a university student on a bus in New Delhi – which sparked angry protests across India – has again shone an uncomfortable spotlight on the levels of violence against women in the country, where sex assaults are often dismissed as mere “eve-teasing”.

National crime records show that 228,650 of the total 256,329 violent crimes recorded last year were against women.

Nine years ago, Mukherjee



Sonali Mukherjee outside her humble home in New Delhi in early December. Pic: AFP

was a promising student at a college in the eastern city of Dhanbad when the three students broke into her home while she was sleeping and hurled acid on her face for rejecting them.

They used a liquid which is normally used to clean rusted tools. It melted Mukherjee’s

eyelids, nose and ears and after 22 surgical procedures, she remains blind and partially deaf. No one has been convicted of the attack.

The three were arrested and spent some time behind bars on remand but were later freed on bail and the case has been bogged in

India’s notoriously slow justice system.

“They couldn’t take a ‘no’ from me and so they decided to snatch my face, and steal my life away,” she said.

The Indian government does not keep figures on acid attacks.

The London-based charity Acid Survivors Trust International says about 1500 acid attacks are reported globally each year. But many victims do not report their injuries to the authorities and suffer in silence.

Mukherjee said that despite many requests, she did not receive any financial or legal support from the state. Instead her family had to sell their two-storey home, farmland, gold and their cattle to cover the cost of her medical expenses.

As she despaired of paying for her treatment, Mukherjee decided to apply to appear on “Kaun Banega Crorepati”, the Indian version of “Who Wants to be a Millionaire” and which was featured in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*.

After being chosen as a contestant, she won 2.5 million rupees (\$45,000) in November after successfully answering 10 questions.

The money will be used to fund a round of plastic surgery in 2013 for Mukherjee, who keeps a portrait of herself as a fresh-faced teenaged cadet.

She said that letters appealing for help had failed to yield results but the sight of her injuries had a much more profound impact.

“Once everything else had failed, I decided to use my face.”

Mukherjee says that while her prize money is welcome, it will not be enough to cover all her medical bills.

“I won some money but I need much more for my treatment,” she said.

Her determination not to be a victim has inspired viewers and members of the audience were in tears when she won the contest.

The host of the show, Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan, called her “the epitome of courage” for “continuing her fight against all the odds”.

“Sometimes we think that our lives are miserable, everything is against us and then (when) we come across someone like Sonali we realise how lucky we are and how much we have got

going for us,” he said on the show.

Mukherjee wants to use her high profile to campaign for fellow victims to push for legislation on acid attacks, which are covered by domestic violence laws that carry relatively light sentences.

In 2011, neighbouring Pakistan adopted legislation increasing the punishment to between 14 years and life for acid attacks and a minimum fine of one million Pakistan rupees (US\$10,200).

“The men who threw acid on me are roaming in the open but if there were stricter punishments then they would be behind bars,” Mukherjee said.

Indian lawyer Aparna Bhatt, who has fought a battle in the Supreme Court for another acid victim, has filed a public petition seeking free medical treatment for acid victims and to regulate the sale of acid.

“India needs a new law to define acid crime in a far more comprehensive manner. There should be free medical care, rehabilitation for the victims,” said Bhatt.

“Acid is a dangerous weapon.” – AFP

Despite harassment, artists champion human rights causes

MOSCOW — Within the space of less than a year a group of young Russian women in 2012 went from being almost unknown provocateurs to global superstars and a symbol of change in their country.

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

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

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

Internet media has allowed artists to try and break censorship at home and spread their message far beyond frontiers, be it Pussy Riot or the equally prominent Chinese artist Ai Weiwei.

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

The scrutiny of the protest leaders is by no means always sympathetic but the project was sufficiently explosive for investigators to raid the home of its director, the filmmaker Pavel Kostomarov who has now suspended the

project.

Pussy Riot first emerged in the autumn of 2011, initially an offshoot of the Russian street art group Voina (War) which had already won a name with subversive stunts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Four members of the group, kitted out in coloured balaclavas, tights and vests managed to perform a "punk prayer" in the altar area of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow imploring the Virgin Mary to "rid us of Putin".

The action itself was chaotic

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

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

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

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

A few years back, the chances of a contemporary Chinese artist becoming a global freedom icon would

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

have been about the same as Russian punk anarchists with a taste for thrash metal.

But as global perceptions of Putin's Russia have been shaped by Pussy Riot, many ideas about China are now seen through the prism of its most internationally prominent cultural figure Ai Weiwei.

Ai's exuberant parody of



Members of the Russian punk band Pussy Riot await trial in Moscow in August 2012.

Pic: AFP

the video Gangnam Style by South Korean rapper Psy — the most viewed YouTube video of all time — on the surface appears charming but was deemed provocative enough for it to be blocked by the Chinese authorities.

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

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

Ai disappeared into police custody for 81 days last year as activists were rounded up amid online calls for Arab Spring-style protests in China and was then fined US\$2.4 million in a tax evasion case.

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

At the end of Iranian director Jafar Panahi's 2000 film *The Circle* about the daily lives of women in Iran,

a prison door slams shut on a cell containing all the main female protagonists of the movie.

The Venice Golden Lion and Berlin Silver Bear-winning filmmaker was feted across the world as one of the most original voices of the Iranian new wave.

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

Along with jailed rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh who is serving an 11-year sentence, Panahi was the co-winner of the EU's Sakharov prize this year in what the organisers said was a message of "solidarity and recognition".

Panahi nonetheless still managed to make a picture — subversively entitled *This Is Not a Film* — about his daily secluded life which was smuggled out of the country on nothing more than a USB stick. — AFP



German film director Werner Herzog attends MIPCOM audiovisual trade show in Cannes, France, on October 3, 2011. Pic: AFP

Herzog relishes turn as villain in 'Jack Reacher'

LOS ANGELES — German filmmaker Werner Herzog is taking a rare turn in front of the camera as a cold-blooded murderer in the new thriller *Jack Reacher*, portraying a character he calls "the epicentre of evil".

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

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

In the film, Reacher teams up with Helen Rodin (played by Rosamund Pike), the lawyer of a sniper accused of killing five people and taken into custody.

While the lead investigator (David Oyelowo) wants to secure a quick confession, the suspect tells the police to find Reacher. And he soon finds someone much more dangerous pulling the strings: The Zec, played by Herzog.

Herzog cuts an imposing, glowering figure, so it might seem an easy acting transition for the German to play really bad guys. And he likes it that way.

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

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

The presence of Herzog in an American blockbuster may seem a bit surprising. But for Herzog, *Jack Reacher* is more than just a popcorn blockbuster.

"I think there is a very strong sense of stylisation. And you also don't see this kind of film noir very often," he said. "In a way, it reminds me of Melville, some of it. Like *Le Samourai*, all-time great movie. And the solitude of the character. He doesn't have a place.

Almost an empty room, one bird in a cage."

In order to coax the long-time filmmaker to appear in front of the camera, Herzog said it took "first, good story-telling, a real good story, with good dialogue".

"And Christopher McQuarrie is very good at dialogue," Herzog said of the American writer and director, who won an Oscar in 1996 for best original screenplay for *The Usual Suspects*.

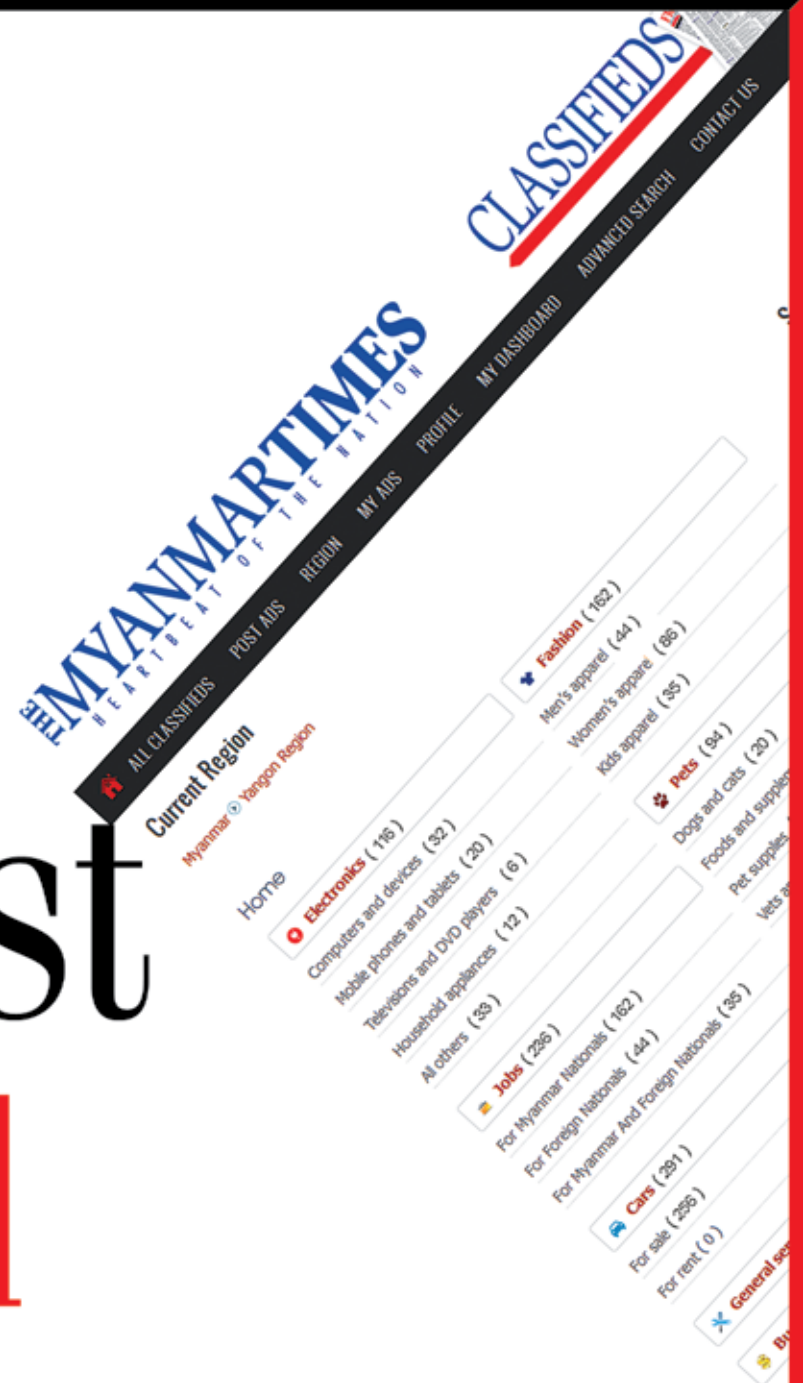
"Secondly, I would expect that the director has some sort of vision that he follows. Then everything is OK. It doesn't have to coincide with my own vision."

The German, known to be a bit demanding, insists that is not the case.

"It's very easy to work with me, and very easy to work with Tom Cruise," Herzog said, heaping praise on his co-star's work. "If somebody holds out for so long at the top, there must be some qualities of professionalism."

— AFP

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Separating the dissident from the artist

By Anne Midgett

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

Since 2009 they've shut down his blog, detained him, kept him under house arrest, beaten him, confiscated his passport and torn down his just-built studio in Shanghai. All of this, predictably, has helped catapult him to renown in the West. Prices for his work have soared, and his name is recognised as a "dissident's" by people who have no idea what his art looks like.

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

"According to What?" is billed as a chance, finally, to get past the "dissident" label and learn what the work is about. But it's not easy to separate Ai's life from his art. The show, which originated at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo in 2009, amalgamates a huge range of material, from monumental sculptures to personal snapshots, into what amounts to a grand performance, with biography and current events and social commentary woven into a mercurial, gleaming, accessible mix.

Why is Ai such a big name? Because he takes big concepts and makes them easy to grasp, often through objects that are aesthetically appealing.

I defy you to look at *Bowls of Pearls* from 2006 — a half-ton of cultivated freshwater pearls — and not want to sink your hands into the abundance of glistening, fleshy, opalescent pinkness — while wondering whether the pearls are less valuable

because there are so many, or more valuable because they are part of a work of art, or fake because they are cultivated, or wasted by being mounded up in two huge porcelain bowls. The questions are real; the work still feels like a guilty pleasure.

Abundance is an Ai theme. One piece, not in this show, involved 100 million hand-painted porcelain sunflower seeds strewn across the floor of London's Tate Modern. Other themes involve authenticity and tradition and the ways in which we — or the authorities — destroy history to preserve it. Ai salvages wood for his sculptures from Qing Dynasty temples, torn down to make

'Why is Ai such a big name? Because he takes big concepts and makes them easy to grasp, often through objects that are aesthetically appealing.'

room for new buildings. Sometimes he himself is the destroyer: In three well-known photographs, he smashes a Han Dynasty vase to the ground.

It used to be said at Time Inc that the trick to selling a magazine is to put on the cover something everyone is already talking about. Ai is a master of that kind of relevance. He established himself as a major figure in China by opening a window on Western traditions that the country was hungry for, returning after 12 years in New York City armed with concepts like dada, pop art, minimalism and conceptual art.

And one reason he's lionised in the West is that he represents a window on China that's appealing to Westerners. His work offers a blend of social criticism and traditional artisanal techniques. Photographs show the barren no-man's lands where the authorities, who own it all, have torn down whole neighbourhoods to make room for building sites. A circle of conjoined and mutilated bicycles, called *Forever*, hearkens back to the time when most of Beijing's population still rode around on two wheels and the Forever brand of bike was the most coveted. A three-dimensional *Map of China* is made of ironwood pieces seamlessly joined without a single nail.

Ai has a magpie sensibility. Operating in so many areas — architect, filmmaker, photographer, maker of objects — he can make art out of almost anything. He picks up ideas where he finds them: stockpiling old ironwood and prehistoric vases (which he embosses with a Coca-Cola logo, a Warholian gesture), channelling the skills of his collaborators, echoing the work of other artists.

He is not the only Chinese artist to work in a wide range of media or to focus on social commentary. Indeed, he is an art-world aggregator, picking up on popular themes in attractive objects that fuse Eastern and Western elements. At one moment, he's personal and artisanal: *Kippe* involves two parallel bars, evoking the Cultural Revolution playgrounds of his childhood, filled with a pile of neatly stacked wood, homage to the way his father piled up the family firewood.

At another, he's cool and modernist, as in the chandelier *Cube Light*, an enormous Donald Judd-like cube whose minimalism is belied by the bling of crystals strung across its chrome bars, looking like decor from a Communist-era banquet hall. The Hirshhorn has just



A portion of 'Forever' (2003), displayed in the Hirshhorn Museum lobby, is part of the 'Ai Weiwei: According to What?' exhibit. Pic: The Washington Post/Matt McClain

acquired the piece for its permanent collection.

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

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

But it's this Szechuan work that ultimately led to his troubles, precisely because he was stepping in to fill a gap that the authorities had deliberately left open, and using their idiom to do it. Those rows of names on the wall look like entries in a government ledger, but they were gathered by private citizens — a project of Ai's called "The Citizen Investigation" — after the government delayed releasing the information.

Still, his work — including the *Snake Ceiling*, made of student backpacks, that runs through the Hirshhorn exhibition rooms — is only part of Ai's reaction to the earthquake. What really made him a hero to the

younger generation in China was the way that he used his blog to call officialdom to account for the corruption and shoddy construction that led the schools to collapse.

The unfiltered rawness of the blog is little in evidence in the Hirshhorn show, which depicts Ai as an exquisite provocateur, his statements wrapped in a lovely, aestheticised veneer. Powerful emotion is processed into restraint, as in the biggest and most achingly poignant Szechuan piece: 40 tons of steel rebar from buildings destroyed in the earthquake, reclaimed and straightened and lying on the floor in a rectangle whose surface rises and falls like a topographical map, sundered by an ugly gash that looks less like a fault line than a flesh wound. The rusted beams look soft and warm, belying their sheer weight, and the sheer horror of the tragedy to which they bear witness.

Imposing though it is, this show affords a somewhat distanced view of an artist who appears to work on controlling his message. It mainly focuses on Ai's mid-career; apart from the walls of photographs of his years in New York, most of the work dates from after 2004, when Ai was already a celebrity in China. And it mainly offers big, beautiful pieces, Duchampian in their readymade aspects and Koonsian in their generous scale and gloss. Any ambivalence in this work, however, is entirely intentional; the pieces deliberately juxtapose the intimacy of the artisanal with the anonymity of mass production.

Also deliberate is the play between control — the sharp crisp edges of geometric shapes, like the *Tea Houses*, shaped entirely of pressed tea leaves — and the lack of it. In 2007, as part of his contribution to the mega-show "documenta (13)", Ai brought 1001 Chinese citizens

to the German city of Kassel; he also set up a large outdoor piece made of old temple doors, which he let lie after it collapsed in a rainstorm, pleased that nature had taken over. Both pieces had an open-endedness, a sense of the random at odds with the careful crafting of many of his objects.

Ai certainly embraces the way his pieces change over time. His 10-hour video of a main road running through Beijing, filmed at 50-yard intervals in 2004, is now no longer a mundane slice of life, but a record of the city's pre-Olympics past.

Still, Ai has been wont to stand at the side of the stage, in the pose of omniscient narrator letting things unfold. His recent detentions and ongoing struggles with the government have turned him, unwillingly, into a protagonist.

You can sense him, in the current show, attempting to regain control of the message, and his own image: including, for instance, a scan of his brain after a police beating caused a cerebral haemorrhage. He also includes, at the end of the exhibit, two photographs from a mid-1990s series called "Studies in Perspective", in which he takes the measure of various landmarks — Tiananmen Square, the White House — by photographing them next to his raised middle finger. After all he has been through, though, the gesture seems less an expression of brash naughtiness than of impotent frustration.

"Ai Weiwei: According to What?" at the Hirshhorn Museum runs through February 24. It will continue on to Indianapolis, Toronto, Miami and Brooklyn, New York. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Seventh Street and Independence Avenue SW, Washington. Open daily 10am to 5:30pm; sculpture garden open 7:30am to dusk. Free.

— The Washington Post



A portion of Ai Weiwei's 'He Xie' (2010), made up of 3200 porcelain crabs, is part of the exhibit 'Ai Weiwei: According to What?', which opened October 7 at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC. Pic: The Washington Post/Matt McClain

Japanese brewers interpret craft beer

By Daniel Fromson

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

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

Toki is one of many restaurants in the DC area that feature one of Japan's least famous but most exciting gastronomic exports. As ramen joints and the small-plate specialists known as izakayas have proliferated so, thankfully, has ji-biru. It is now easier than ever to taste how Japanese brewers are reinterpreting American

and European beer styles, adding their own balance and refinement, and sometimes local ingredients including rice and sweet potatoes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To be sure, one aspect of ji-biru really is big and bold: its price. In Washington,



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

restaurants tend to sell 12-ounce bottles for US\$8 to \$12. Not everyone approves, including Daisuke Utagawa, co-owner of the Sushiko restaurants here.

"We always have to think about the price factor," he says. "There's a lot to explore with beer and Japanese cuisine. Does it have to be Japanese beer? I don't think so."

Still, drinkers who try ji-biru will be rewarded. A good starting point is Hitachino Nest White Ale, a Belgian-style wheat beer with notes of

orange, nutmeg and Riesling-like fruitiness. Hitachino Nest Red Rice Ale, meanwhile, contains 25 percent rice and is fermented with both sake and ale yeasts, resulting in a hard-to-categorise amber beer that smells like strawberries and tastes like caramel, apples and prunes.

Other breweries to seek out include Coedo, whose Coedo Beniaka is a spicy sweet potato beer that resembles a dark Belgian ale; Echigo, whose Pilsener-like Koshihikari rice lager contains hints of toasted grain; and Yo-Ho Brewing,

whose Yona Yona pale ale bursts with tropical fruit.

Then there's Baird Brewing's Kurofune Porter, an elegant mixture of coffee and caramel flavours that is lighter in body than many American dark beers and unusually dry. "The aesthetic in Japan is an aesthetic of simplicity, with waves and waves of complexity within the simplicity," Bryan Baird says.

He adds, "I don't think I'd be making beer like this if it weren't for the influence of Japan."

— The Washington Post

Top wine picks of 2012 include \$18,000 Burgundy to cheap mencia

By Elin McCoy

THIS year I sampled more than 4000 wines in my search for the recommendable, hunting the world's best in chilly cellars, historic chateaux, at noisy tastings and the tables of generous friends.

Here, in no particular order, are my 10 most memorable wines, from bargain to blowout. They range from a great Bordeaux to a new California red to a scarce bottling from the mountains of Armenia. All reflect the growing diversity of today's wine world — and where it's going in 2013. (Listed prices are for the US market.)

— 2009 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Romanée-Conti (US\$14,000 to \$18,000): Auction prices for the best vintages from Burgundy star Domaine de la Romanée-Conti continue to rocket out of sight. So I eagerly anticipated the DRC's annual release tasting in New York for the much-touted 2009s. The silken texture, complexity, and seductiveness of DRC's Romanée-Conti is everything I want in a great wine — except affordability. I swallowed every drop.

— 2010 Gaba do Xil Mencia Valdeorras (\$14): To make a wine with authentic character that costs less than \$15 is not easy, but Spanish wine whiz Telmo

Rodriguez is noted for devoting as much passion to his cheap wines as his expensive ones. He uses native Spanish grape mencia, hand-picked from an ancient vineyard, for this lively red with floral aromas and an almost meaty character.

— 1963 Quinta do Noval Nacional port (\$4500 to \$6500): Until recently, I'd had only one vintage of the legendary port made from Quinta do Noval's tiny 2.5-hectare Nacional vineyard. This year, a 12-vintage tasting showed me how much I'd missed. At nearly 50 years of age, this deep, layered fortified wine is all tangy red plums and savoury earth. It's up

there with the most profound wines I've ever sipped, making me wonder: Why don't more people collect port?

— 2009 Littorai B.A Thieriot Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$75): Pinot maestro Ted Lemon, owner of western Sonoma's Littorai winery, makes some of California's best bottlings. I sampled his nine pinots after an afternoon dodging chickens in his biodynamic vineyard and fell hard for this one.

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

— 2010 Zorah Karasi Areni Noir (\$45): In Izmir, Turkey, I was wowed by my first-ever taste of an Armenian wine, this stylish red made from areni noir grapes and aged in traditional clay amphora. Smoky, silky elegance, soft mulberry-like fruit and wild earth notes are part of the wine's appeal; I also savoured the thrill of drinking history. It's the first vintage from a new wine making project near the Areni-1 cave, where archaeologists discovered the world's oldest winery, dating back 6100 years.

— 1989 Chateau Haut-Brion (\$1400 to \$1700): A debate over which Bordeaux vintage is better, the opulent 1989 or classic 1990, has raged for two decades. A tasting organised by Chicago auction house Hart Davis Hart Wine Co gave me the chance to compare first growth and other top crus classes from both years. My conclusion: I preferred the 1990 from several chateaux, the 1989 from others like the completely stunning Chateau Haut-Brion, with its cassis-and-cigar-smoke bouquet and memorable lingering finish.

— 2008 Domaine du Closel Clos du Papillon Savennieres (\$35): After tromping through knee-deep snow in this domaine's Clos

du Papillon vineyard, I savoured several vintages of the intense, earthy, dry white in front of a welcome fire. The 2008 tastes of citrus and honey and pulses with energy and minerality. The grape is chenin blanc, and the tiny Savennieres appellation, which produces some of the Loire's most complex, serious and long-lived dry whites, deserves to be much better known.

— 2011 Copain Wine Cellars Trousseau (\$42): Surprise of the year? This light, intriguing, positively gulpable red from one of California's top pinot noir winemakers, Wells Guthrie. Trousseau, an obscure grape from France's Jura region, is the new, new thing in Sonoma. Guthrie coaxes out all its spice-and-earth deliciousness. For a first release, this is a huge success. More California trousseau, please.

— 2008 Tenuta di Biserno, Biserno (\$140 to \$180): Marchese Lodovico Antinori, the suave founder of Italy's Ornellaia, wore a Savile Row suit to show off the first wines from his new project in the Maremma region on Tuscany's coast. The most recent vintage of his Biserno cuvee, the 2008, is made mostly from cabernet franc. It's flat-out gorgeous — deep, powerful and opulent, with plush plum and mocha notes, yet elegant, too.

— 2002 Philipponnat Clos des Goisses Brut Champagne (\$200): The combination of a great vintage and the terroir of the 5.5-hectare (13.6-acre) Clos des Goisses vineyard add up to one of Champagne's most impressive and complex single-vineyard cuvees. At a Rare Wine Co. tasting of stellar wines surrounded by a fascinating exhibit of historic food and wine posters, this bubbly's wonderful aromas of white flowers and subtle, concentrated citrus and pear flavours kept distracting me. Though still too young, it's my fizz choice for New Year's Eve. — Bloomberg News



The Domaine de la Romanée-Conti's 2009 wines, lined up for the annual release tasting at the Palace Hotel in New York last February. Pic: Bloomberg News/Elin McCoy



Phyo's Cooking Adventure

Phyo cuts through culture to reveal life's true taste

Fried pork ribs and rice noodle salad

HERE'S another simple recipe to add to your holiday repertoire: pork ribs. I have used Japanese ingredients to marinate the meat, and I have boiled the ribs and fried them

to make them tender. The flavours of soy sauce and the sweetness of mirin add a distinctive taste. After boiling the meat, the tasty and rich flavour of sauce can be reserved for use with stir fry, as stock base for soup, and in dressing. I have used it here to make a simple rice noodle salad. Always use rice noodles or soba noodles with this stock. You can serve the pork ribs with rice as well. Enjoy this easy recipe, and have a very safe a very happy New Year celebration.

1/3 cup of Kikomon soy sauce
1 1/2 teaspoons of brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon of salt

PREPARATION

After cleaning and washing pork ribs, drain them well and pat them dry. Then cut them into pieces 8-10 centimetres in length. To prepare the marinade for the ribs, add mirin, soy sauce and brown sugar into a big bowl and mix them until the sugar dissolves. Then marinate the pork ribs in the bowl, and keep them in the fridge for at least 30 minutes. Put the ribs in a big stock pot and fill it with just enough water to cover the meat. Put the lid on and bring the water to a boil. After boiling for 5 minutes, turn the heat down to medium and cook for another 10-15 minutes. When the meat is tender turn off the heat and let it cool, keeping the lid on the pot. In the meantime, you can prepare the noodles for the noodle salad (see below). When the meat is cool enough to handle, scoop it out of the pot and set it aside. Then drain the



Pic: Phyo

Rice noodle salad
INGREDIENTS
1/2 of a packet of rice stick noodles or pad thai noodles
3 shallots (sliced diagonally)
2 tablespoon of roasted sesame seeds
2 teaspoon of sesame oil
1/3 cup of reserved pork stock (from the above recipe)
1 teaspoon of salt
1 teaspoon of vegetable oil
1 teaspoon of freshly grated ginger
1 teaspoon of crushed garlic

PREPARATION

Soak the rice noodles in cold water for at least 30 minutes. Then boil the water (according to the ratio on the packet instructions), and add a teaspoon of salt and a teaspoon of vegetable oil. When the water is boiling, add the noodles into boiling water for 15 seconds, drain well, and set aside. For the dressing, add all the remaining ingredients into a large bowl and mix them well. Pour the dressing on top when serving the noodles. Divide the noodles among six people on small plates, and then garnish with the shallots. You can also add red chilies for spice lovers.

Main Tips

Let the pork dry well before marinating so that all the lovely, yummy juice can soak into the meat. Use a big stock pot with enough space for all the ribs so then they cook evenly. You can add one more teaspoon of sugar if you want to have a glaze on the pork after it is fried.

QUAFFING QUOTE
"Pork fat rules!" — Emeril Lagasse, celebrity chef and restaurateur

NEXT WEEK
Pumpkins for curries, sweets and snacks.

Red Wine

Jean Guillot Chateau Bouteilley Merlot-Cabernet Sauvignon 2009
This classic, dark red merlot-cabernet sauvignon varietal combination offers well-balanced berry flavours and a soft, lingering finish. Perfect match for mountain sunsets and cool winter air.



Score BOX
8/10

Ks 15,300

White Wine

Marques de Caceres Rioja Blanco 2011
This dry white wine, produced in Spain from vuira grapes, has a tangy flavour that matches with grilled fish and sashimi. Goes well with ocean breezes and coastal sunsets.



Score BOX
8/10

Ks 12,600

FOOD REVIEW

WHEN Jason Mraz's entourage waltzed into Chatrium Hotel's Ritz Exclusive Lounge earlier this month, they were surprised to find a cocktail named in honour of the American artist: Mraz Magic. "It was very popular, they loved it a lot," said Ritz bar manager Kenneth Brian (Aung Htay), who devised the drink. "It's specially designed to make the party go on and on." But Mraz Magic is not your average cocktail; its main ingredient is sake, the Japanese alcohol generally made from fermented rice. Potent but delightfully drinkable, it also features vodka, blue curacao, lime juice and Red Bull. To say Mr Brian knows his sake is something of an understatement. Over the past few months he has overseen the establishment of a sake bar in the Ritz Exclusive Lounge using the knowledge he gleaned from eight years working abroad, including stints in Singapore and Dubai, where he even hosted private parties for oil-rich Arab princes. ("They would book out the whole bar, just a group of 20 of them, and then go down to the restaurant to try and encourage other guests to come and join them.") He joined Chatrium after returning to Myanmar in 2011, and earlier this year convinced the hotel's general manager that Yangon was ready for a sake bar. While the premise is simple, the execution is harder than you would expect, particularly when you are offering more than 30 types of sake, 10 types of soju and 13 sake-based cocktails. "At first I was a bit afraid that nobody would like it, particularly because sake is more expensive than whiskey. Also, we have to import everything — what if we run out and can't get more? These were things I was worried about at first," he said.

Slaking your thirst with sake cocktails



Ritz Exclusive Lounge at Chatrium Hotel

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

Food:	NA
Drink:	10
Atmosphere:	8
Service:	9
X Factor:	9
Value for money:	8

Score BOX
9/10

"We also had to train the staff, because many of the bottles don't have any English writing. Also, most Myanmar and European guests don't know much about it, so we have to be able to explain and recommend something." The row of empty bottles behind the bar from the previous night, when, the weary-looking Mr Brian said, the festivities ended around 4:30am, is testament to its early success. "We've already gone through about 25 bottles of this one in little more than a month," he said, holding up a 1.8 litre bottle of the bar's house sake, Ozeki Silver, which sells for US\$7 for a 150-millilitre pot. More expensive varieties have also proven popular, including a sparkling sake that comes in 300ml bottles priced at \$80. A bottle of Hyakujyu Kabota goes for the princely sum of \$180. Sound on the expensive side? Not so, Mr Brian said. "The first thing our Japanese guests say is, 'wow, you have a sake bar'. The second thing is, 'and it's so cheap'. Internationally, our house sake, for example, would be \$10 or \$12. But in Myanmar we try to keep the prices down because most people aren't very familiar. We just want them to give it a go," he said. To encourage this, Mr Brian offers what he calls a "sake flight": a handle of three small cups of different types of sake: *honjozo*, *junmai* and *dai ginjo*. One of the main challenges is overcoming misconceptions about the drink: that it is rough, or too high in alcohol. To ease people in, there's the range of cocktails as well as plum sake, or *umeshu*, which has so far been popular with Myanmar visitors. "It's like a dessert wine; ladies really like it," he said. "People in Myanmar are still not familiar with sake but hopefully I can slowly introduce them to it."



@ Ocean Super Centre (East Point)



Mr. Nuttaporn @ Health way

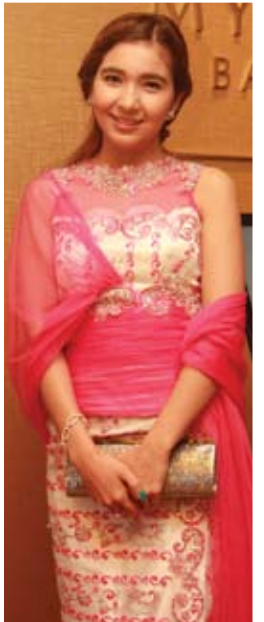
U Zaw Myo Swe @ Health way



Pyay Ti Oo and Eindra Kyaw Zin @ Health way



@ Canmake Tokyo at Dagon Centre



Chit Thu Wai @ Fathe School



@ 100 Plus



@ Mango Marketing year-end celebration



Ko Thaw Tint @ TAC



@ December 24



V-MODA Girls and Dance Group @ TAC



@ Real Fitness Promotion



Ko Thaw Tint and Ko Nay Lin @ THE ANALYTICS COMPANY



@ December



@ Mango Marketing year-end celebration



@ Canmake Tokyo at Dagon Centre



@ Mango Marketing year-end celebration



@ Ocean Super Centre (East Point)



@ Canmake Tokyo at Dagon Centre



Sai Sai Kham Leng @ Exposure studio opening

SOCIALITE
WITH NYEIN EI EI HTWE

WITH NYEIN EI EI HTWE



SOCIALITE was quite busy before the Christmas break, attending one event after another. She started with a dinner hosted by Healthway at Sedona Hotel on December 17. The next day she visited the December 24 Art Gallery opening ceremony in Bahan township, and the Real Fitness launch at Junction Square. On the same day opening at Aung San Stadium and the Father's Day event at the Sunlight Hotel. On December 19 Socialite attended the Myanmar Marketing's event, followed the next day by Mango Marketing's event. Myanmar Brewery held a blood donation event at the Myanmar Brewery, as well as a sales event at the Myanmar Brewery. She wound up the year with a ceremony for THE ANALYTICS at the Park Royal Hotel.



@ 100 Plus trade launch



@ Myanmar Brewerv blood donation



Thandar Bo @ Father's School movie screening



Ko Myo Aung and Ma Win Win Thant @ Myanmar
Brewery blood donation



Awn Seng @ 100
Plus trade launch



@ Real Fitness Promotion



@ Myanmar Brewery blood donation



U Thet Soe, Ko Min Ko Ko Soe & Daw Sandar Win @ TAC



@ Real Fitness Promotion



@ Exposure studio opening

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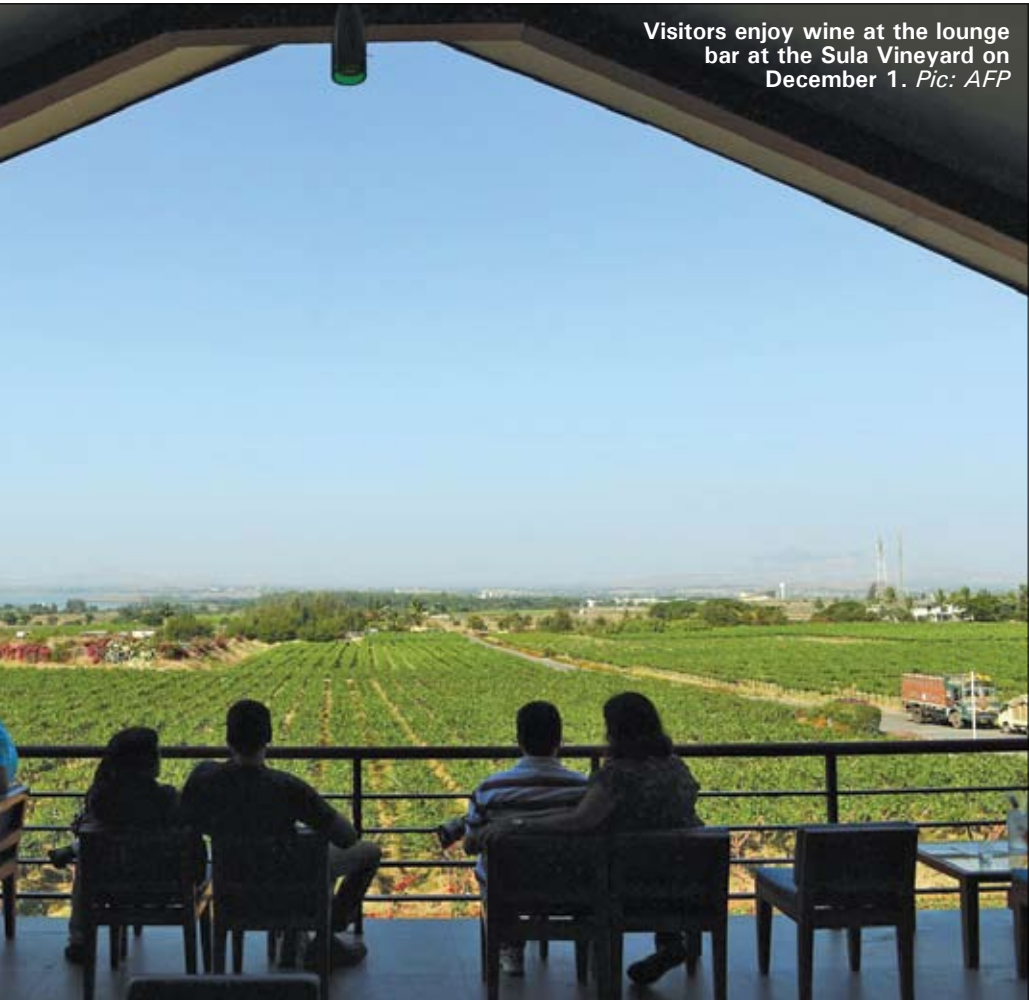
UNITED PHARMA

Serving Your Healthcare Needs

DOMESTIC FLIGHT SCHEDULES

Days	Flight	Dep	Arr	Days	Flight	Dep	Arr	Days	Flight	Dep	Arr	Days	Flight	Dep	Arr	Days	Flight	Dep	Arr	Days	Flight	Dep	Arr
YANGON TO NAY PYI TAW																							
MON	6T 111	07:00	07:55																				
	UB-A1	07:45	08:45																				
	UB-B1	11:30	12:30																				
	UB-C1	16:00	17:00																				
TUE	UB-A1	07:45	08:45																				
	UB-B1	11:30	12:30																				
	UB-C1	16:00	17:00																				
WED	UB-A1	07:45	08:45																				
	UB-B1	11:30	12:30																				
	UB-C1	16:00	17:00																				
THUR	UB-A1	07:45	08:45																				
	UB-B1	11:30	12:30																				
	UB-C1	16:00	17:00																				
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	UB-A1	07:45	08:45																				
	UB-B1	11:30	12:30																				
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MON	6T 112	08:15	09:10																				
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TUE	UB-A2	09:15	10:15																				
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	UB-C2	17:30	18:30																				
THUR	UB-A2	09:15	10:15																				
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FRI	6T 112	17:05	18:00																				
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	UB-B2	13:00	14:00																				
SAT	UB-A2	10:00	11:00																				
	UB-A2	17:00	18:00																				
YANGON TO MANDALAY																							
MON	W9 205	06:00	07:25																				
	YH 917	06:10	08:30																				
	YJ 891	06:15	08:20																				
	6T 401	06:20	08:25																				
	YJ 909	06:30	07:55																				
	YH 909	06:30	08:10																				
	K7 222	06:30	08:40																				
	W9 143	07:00	09:05																				
	W9 011	07:30	08:30																				
	YJ 911	09:15	10:40																				
	W9 119	10:30	12:55																				
	W9 014	11:00	12:00																				
	YJ 761	11:00	12:55																				
	YH 727	11:15	13:25																				
	K7 622	12:00	13:25																				
	W9 109	14:30	16:10																				
	6T 501	13:45	15:45																				
	6T 341	15:00	16:25																				
	YJ 791	15:00	16:55																				
	YH 731	15:00	17:10																				
	W9 211	16:00	17:25																				

Valley’ draws tourists



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

“They’re coming with their families and they’re open to the idea of wine,” said Sula’s hospitality executive Swapnil Dangarikar.

They are encouraged to enjoy wine with food: The menu at the on-site Indian restaurant suggests novel pairings such as cabernet shiraz with chicken tikka masala.

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

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

Just 0.01 litres of wine were drunk per person in 2010 according to US Trade Data and Analysis figures, compared with 0.69 litres in China – now a major international wine market –

and 45.70 litres in France.

But the small Indian market is expanding rapidly, with consumption rising 40 percent in the three years from 2007.

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

“We’re going to see a tipping point in the next couple of years in domestic wine,” said Myles Mayall, a buyer and educator at the Wine Society of India, which sells imported and local cases.

While an Indian wine revival began 30 years ago, “only in the last four years has it been any good”, he said.

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

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

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

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

Yet confidence in Indian wine is slowly growing, and Phadtare believes a key to success lies in wine tourists.

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

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

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

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

– AFP

International Airlines	
Air Asia (FD) 33, Alan Pya Pagoda Rd, Ground Flr, Parkroyal Hotel, Yangon. Tel: 251 885, 251 886.	Bangkok Airways (PG) #0305, 3rd Fl, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 255122, 255 265, Fax: 255119
Air Bagan Ltd.(W9) 56, Shwe Taung Gyar Street, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 513322, 513422, 504888, Fax : 515102	Malaysia Airlines (MH) 335/357, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 387648, 241007 ext : 120, 121, 122 Fax : 241124
Air China (CA) Building (2), corner of Pyay Rd and Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd, Hotel Yangon, 8 miles, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel : 666112, 655882.	Myanmar Airways International(8M) 08-02, Sakura Tower, 339, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Kyauktada Tsp, Ygn. Tel : 255260, Fax: 255305
Air India 75, Shwe Bon Thar St, Pabedan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 253597-98, 254758. Fax: 248175	

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES																												
DAYS Flight			Dep	Arr	Days Flight			Dep	Arr	Days Flight			Dep	Arr	Days Flight			Dep	Arr									
YANGON TO BANGKOK					YANGON TO BEIJING					BEIJING TO YANGON					FRANKFURT TO YANGON					KAULA LUMPUR TO YANGON								
MON	PG 706	07:15	09:30		TUE	CA 906	14:15	21:55		TUE	8M 336	06:40	07:25		TUE	CA 905	8:05	13:15		TUE	DE 2368	12:40	04:25		MON	AK 1424	06:55	08:00
	8M 335	08:40	10:25		WED	CA 906	14:15	21:55			FD 3707	07:15	08:00		WED	CA 905	8:05	13:15							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45		THUR	CA 906	14:15	21:55			PG 701	09:05	09:55		THUR	CA 905	8:05	13:15							8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40		SAT	CA 906	14:15	21:55			TG 301	13:00	13:55		SAT	CA 905	8:05	13:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40		SUN	CA 906	14:15	21:55			FD 3772	16:50	17:35		SUN	CA 905	8:05	13:15							8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15		YANGON TO FRANKFURT							PG 703	17:05	17:55		YANGON TO GAUNGZHOU										8M 502	14:00	15:00
	PG 704	18:45	20:40		WED	DE 2369	05:35	16:40			8M 335	17:50	18:45		TUE	AK 1420	15:40	16:45							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35		YANGON TO GAUNGZHOU							PG 705	20:15	21:30		WED	AK 1424	06:55	08:00						MH 740	10:05	11:15	
TUE	PG 706	07:15	09:30		YANGON TO TAIPEI							8M 336	06:40	07:25		THU	AK 1424	06:55	08:00						8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25		MON	CI 7916	11:10	16:35			FD 3770	07:15	08:00			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45		TUE	CI 7916	11:10	16:35			8M 332	17:50	18:45		WED	AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40		WED	BR 288	11:35	17:20			PG 705	20:15	21:30			MH 740	10:05	11:15							8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40		THUR	CI 7916	11:10	16:35			8M 336	06:40	07:25		THU	AK 1420	15:40	16:45							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15		THUR	CI 7916	11:10	16:35			FD 3770	07:15	08:00			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40		FRI	CI 7916	11:10	16:35			TG 303	07:55	08:50		THU	AK 1424	06:55	08:00							8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35		SAT	BR 288	11:35	17:20			PG 701	09:05	09:55			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
WED	PG 706	07:15	09:30		SAT	CI 7916	11:10	16:35			TG 301	13:00	13:55		FRI	AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25		SUN	BR 288	11:35	17:20			FD 3772	16:50	17:35			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45		YANGON TO KUNMING							PG 703	17:05	17:55			MH 740	10:05	11:15						AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40		MON	MU 2032	14:40	17:55			TG 305	17:50	18:45		SAT	AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40		TUE	CA 906	14:15	17:35			8M 332	19:20	20:05			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15		WED	MU 2032	14:40	17:55			PG 705	20:15	21:30		SAT	AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40		THUR	CA 906	14:15	17:35			8M 336	06:40	07:25			MH 740	10:05	11:15							8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35		FRI	MU 2032	14:40	17:55			FD 3770	07:15	08:00		SUN	AK 1420	15:40	16:45							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
FRI	PG 706	07:15	09:30		SAT	CA 906	14:15	17:35			TG 303	07:55	08:50			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25		SUN	MU 2032	14:40	17:55			FD 3772	16:50	17:35			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45		YANGON TO KOLKATA							PG 703	17:05	17:55			MH 740	10:05	11:15						8M 502	14:00	15:00	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40		MON	AI 234	14:05	17:10			8M 332	19:20	20:05			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40		FRI	AI 234	14:05	17:10			PG 705	20:15	21:30		SAT	AK 1424	06:55	08:00							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15		SAT	AI 228	18:45	19:45			8M 336	06:40	07:25			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40		YANGON TO CHIANG MAI							FD 3770	07:15	08:00			MH 740	10:05	11:15						AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35		THUR	W9 7607	14:50	16:20			FD 3772	16:50	17:35			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
SUN	PG 706	07:15	09:30		SUN	W9 9607	14:50	16:20			PG 703	17:05	17:55			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25		YANGON TO HANOI							TG 305	17:50	18:45			MH 740	10:05	11:15						AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45		MON	VN 956	19:10	21:30			8M 332	19:20	20:05			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40		TUE	VN 956	19:10	21:30			PG 705	20:15	21:30			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40		WED	VN 956	19:10	21:30			8M 336	06:40	07:25			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15		THUR	VN 956	19:10	21:30			FD 3770	07:15	08:00			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40		FRI	VN 956	19:10	21:30			TG 303	07:55	08:50			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35		SAT	VN 956	19:10	21:30			PG 701	09:05	09:55			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 706	07:15	09:30		SUN	VN 956	19:10	21:30			TG 301	13:00	13:55			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	8M 335	08:40	10:25		YANGON TO HO CHI MINH							FD 3772	16:50	17:35			AK 1424	06:55	08:00						AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 304	09:50	11:45		TUE	VN 942	14:25	17:10			PG 703	17:05	17:55			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	PG 702	10:45	12:40		THUR	VN 942	14:25	17:10			TG 305	17:50	18:45			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	TG 302	14:55	16:40		SAT	VN 942	14:25	17:10			8M 332	19:20	20:05			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	8M 331	16:30	18:15		SUN	VN 942	14:25	17:10			PG 705	20:15	21:30			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	PG 704	18:45	20:40		YANGON TO GAYA							8M 336	06:40	07:25			AK 1424	06:55	08:00						AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	TG 306	19:40	21:35		MON	8M 601	09:00	10:20			FD 2755	11:35	12:20			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
YANGON TO DON MUENG							AI 234	14:05	15:25			FD 2753	16:20	17:05			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15
MON	FD 2752	08:30	10:20		WED	8M 601	09:00	10:20			TUE	FD 2751	07:15	08:00			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45
	FD 2756	12:50	14:40		FRI	8M 601	09:00	10:20			FD 2755	11:35	12:20			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	FD 2754	17:35	19:25			AI 234	14:05	15:25			FD 2753	16:20	17:05			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
TUE	FD 2752	08:30	10:20		SAT	8M 601	09:00	10:20			FD 2751	07:15	08:00			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	FD 2756	12:50	14:40		YANGON TO DOHA							FD 2755	11:35	12:20			MH 740	10:05	11:15						AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	FD 2754	17:35	19:25		MON	QR 619	08:00	11:45			FD 2753	16:20	17:05			AK 1420	15:40	16:45							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
WED	FD 2752	08:30	10:20		TUE	QR 619	08:00	11:45			FD 2751	07:15	08:00			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
	FD 2756	12:50	14:40		WED	QR 619	08:00	11:45			FD 2755	11:35	12:20			AK 1424	06:55	08:00							MH 740	10:05	11:15	
	FD 2754	17:35	19:25		THUR	QR 619	08:00	11:45			FD 2753	16:20	17:05			MH 740	10:05	11:15							AK 1420	15:40	16:45	
THUR	FD 2752	08:30	10:20		FRI	QR 619	08:00	11:45			FD 2751	07:15	08:00			AK 1420	15:40	16:45										

Events Flash

Alliance 10-year anniversary show

KZL Art Studio and Gallery (184/84A Thanlwin Road, Bahan township, Yangon) is hosting a 10-year anniversary show from December 25 to 31. The work of more than 30 artists is on display.

42nd anniversary exhibition

Lokanat Art Gallery (62 Pansodan Street, First Floor Kyauktada township) will hold its 42nd Anniversary Art Exhibition from December 5 to 31. The show will feature the work of more than 25 eminent member artists of the gallery. The paintings are in oil, watercolour and acrylic on canvas and are mostly realist in style.

Final Exhibit 2012

Gallery 65 (65 Yaw Min Gyi Road, Dagon township, Yangon) is presenting its year-end show, the Final Exhibit 2012, from December 15 to January 15. The gallery will

showcase paintings across a wide range of styles, from contemporary to traditional. Gallery 65 is open 10am to 6pm daily.

Calle de la Salsa

Tuesday is salsa night at 50th Street Bar, featuring free dance classes (salsa, bachata, mambo, meringue and more), plus dance shows and drink specials. With music by DJ Mani and special guests.

Wednesday wine

The Wednesday Wine Club meets every (you guessed it) Wednesday at the QP Inya Shop (30 Inya Road). Taste four or five wines for K10,000 a person. Contact chad.quarto@gmail.com or 09-7321-8711.

Live music

Friendship Band belts out classic rock tunes at 50th Street Restaurant every Wednesday and Friday night.

If you would like your event listed in Event Flash, please email editors@myanmartimes.com.mm.

CIA chief decries torture in Osama bin Laden movie

By Chantal Valery

WASHINGTON — Acting CIA director Michael Morell said that *Zero Dark Thirty*, the Hollywood take on the hunt for Osama bin Laden, exaggerates the importance of information obtained by harsh interrogations.

The movie by Academy Award-winning director Kathryn Bigelow tells the story of the decade-long search after September 11, 2001, that climaxed in last year's dramatic and deadly raid in May on the Al-Qaeda terror leader's hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

The film shows US personnel using harsh interrogation techniques like waterboarding — a method widely seen as torture — to force captives to speak. The information obtained was crucial, according to the movie, in piecing together the trail that eventually led to bin Laden.

Not so, Morell said in a message to Central Intelligence Agency employees released earlier this month.

The movie "creates the strong impression that the

enhanced interrogation techniques that were part of our former detention and interrogation program were the key to finding bin Laden. That impression is false".

Morell's message, sent to the employees on December 21, states that "multiple streams of intelligence" led CIA analysts to conclude that bin Laden was hiding in Abbottabad.

He acknowledged that "some" of the information "came from detainees subjected to enhanced techniques. But there were many other sources as well."

The controversial techniques were banned in 2009 by President Barack Obama.

Morell said that "whether enhanced interrogation techniques were the only timely and effective way to obtain information from those detainees, as the film suggests, is a matter of debate that cannot and never will be definitively resolved".

Morell's message, first reported by *The New York Times*, echoes a statement decrying the *Zero Dark Thirty* interrogation scenes signed by three senators, including Republican John McCain,

himself a prisoner of war and torture victim during the Vietnam war.

In a letter to the head of Sony Pictures, McCain — the 2008 Republican presidential candidate — and Democratic senators Diane Feinstein and Carl Levin wrote that the movie "clearly implies that the CIA's coercive interrogation techniques were effective" in obtaining information that would lead to bin Laden.

"We have reviewed CIA records and know that this is incorrect," the senators wrote. "We believe that you have an obligation to state that the role of torture in the hunt for [Bin Laden] is not based on the facts, but rather part of the film's fictional narrative."

However two CIA officials active when suspects were tortured disputed those assertions.

Jose Rodriguez, who oversaw the CIA's counterterrorism operations when "harsh interrogation" methods were in use, wrote in the *Washington Post* in April that the path leading to bin Laden "started in a CIA black site ... and stemmed from information obtained

from hardened terrorists who agreed to tell us some [but not all] of what they knew after undergoing harsh but legal interrogation methods."

And former CIA director Michael Hayden wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* in June 2011 that a "crucial component" of information that eventually led to bin Laden came from three CIA prisoners, "all of whom had been subjected to some form of enhanced interrogation."

Hayden claimed that he learned the information when, in 2007, he was first briefed about pursuing bin Laden through his courier network.

But interim CIA director Morell emphasised the film, a likely Oscar contender, "takes significant artistic license, while portraying itself as being historically accurate."

"What I want you to know is that *Zero Dark Thirty* is a dramatisation, not a realistic portrayal of the facts. CIA interacted with the filmmakers through our Office of Public Affairs but, as is true with any entertainment project with which we interact, we do not control the final product."

— AFP



YOUR STARS

By Astrologer
Aung Myin Kyaw

Aquarius

(Jan 20 - Feb 18)

Your strong sense of justice and sympathy for others might decline for an extended period. In the changing political climate, use your management skills to increase your wealth, which has been stagnant for a long time. Take it easy and wait for obstructions to pass by. There will be a noticeable decrease in tensions with your associates, especially with romantic partners. After June you will experience positive changes in your love life, and professional opportunities will also come your way. Sometimes you will find it tough to get your life organised, but you should be able to realise your full potential without conjectural thoughts. The more you try to prove yourself, the more others will avoid you and talk behind your back.

Pisces

(Feb 19 - Mar 20)

From May until the end of the year, your intractable nature will change into a flirtatious consciousness. A smattering of knowledge about almost everything in general will suit you better than a thorough knowledge of one thing in particular. You will pass through a long period of intellectual restlessness and an inclination to jump from one subject to another. Social communication will be problematic in May and December. Your lifestyle will become more comfortable after May. You will have to solve unexpected sexual problems. Business management will be out of balance in January, July and August. Observe deeply that neutral men are the allies of the devil, and love of money is the mother of all evils.

Aries

(March 21 - April 19)

You will establish good relationships with important people in the coming year. Remind yourself that rushing into what seems to be a permanent relationship could be a big mistake. Breakdowns from overwork might be your greatest danger. In January, April, May and August, take action based on good diplomacy and an optimistic outlook. In June, July and December, your impulsive nature could create social tension, leading to problems with potential partners and close friends. Be careful to avoid speaking too abruptly or impatiently. Keep a journal to record your love journey; allowing for different rhythms to develop within the relationship means discarding small rules and opening up channels through which you can find the true value of love.

Taurus

(April 20 - May 20)

Pursuit of great needs can make you seem entirely materialistic, which is not of course the whole truth. Your enormous patience and charm will get you far, but you might feel discontented in April and May because of the loss of possible opportunities. But new chances will come your way after May, especially those related to public service. Keep your plans to yourself but don't resist social change.

Interchangeable, reciprocal, believable and respectable relationships are essential to cultivate on your way to success and victory. The decision to pay attention to someone is the first act of self-limitation, the first sacrifice, the first gift you must give in the name of love.

Gemini

(May 21 - June 20)

Important planetary configurations falling in those areas of your horoscope that concern your standing in the world, or occupational matters, could be very helpful during the 12 months ahead. Well aspected too is the area that concerns your associations, personal hopes and ambitions, friendships and new acquaintances. From March to June, love affairs might be subject to disturbance. November and December will call for caution concerning your mental state, which could descend into nervous disorder unless you put extra energy into maintaining a positive outlook. Each unit perceives its own truth, and the truths of one unit will differ from the truths of other units, due to variations in the instruments of perception.

Cancer

(June 22 - July 22)

August and October aspects will contribute to nervous tension and an unsettled state of mind, with consequent outbursts of temper or irritability at even the slightest frustration. More rest than usual is advisable but relaxation will not come easily. You can gain much by putting your energy into the right areas and taking things as they come, especially in January, March, April and May. Before May, you should react more through your intellectual functions than with your feelings and senses. After May, there could be a wonderful reconstruction in your life, especially in family relationships or love affairs. You might need a change of environment to become fully aroused.

Leo

(July 23 - Aug 22)

Anything connected with relations and close friends could be a source of upheaval and trouble. You will need to use caution in dealing with them, or any matters that concern them, after June. In January, March, April and May you should feel confident and satisfied with your social activities and with your efforts to reach your professional golden gate. A great opportunity will help make you happy and pave the way to an easier life, but after June be sure to dedicate some effort toward spiritual pursuits that will lead you closer to purification and self-perfection. Maintaining emotional balance will be essential to staying healthy. July to December will be an unusually calm period, and most processes will run smoothly.

Virgo

(Aug 23 - Sept 22)

The New Year ahead can be stimulating, especially if you enjoy the challenges of life. Much depends on your compatibility with others in your social circle, which could make your life problematic if communication is confused. On the other hand, clarity of speech could help create new opportunities, especially in the area of education. January to May will be extremely favourable for your career, and you could receive a high honour during this period. After May a new romantic chapter might open in your life, but unexpected social affairs will disturb your mind again and again. From August to December keep your eyes open for new business partners who could help you achieve your goals.

Libra

(Sept 23 - Oct 22)

For some time to come, the way will be clear to pursue your personal ambitions without destructive elements blocking your path. Even misjudgments on your part could lead to the revelation of hidden and unexpected opportunities. Especially from March to August, the only factors that might hold you back are your own fears and inhibitions; to get past this, be prepared to alter your viewpoints about people, about social interaction and even about life itself. In your search for imaginative solutions, do not overlook the fact that harmony is not always the best thing to seek. The omelette of life cannot be made without some eggs being broken, and there should be a time for regrouping your ideas and reconstructing your attitude.

Scorpio

(Oct 23 - Nov 21)

Establishing and maintaining good relations with others will be of great importance in the coming year. This will be easiest to accomplish in January, February, March, April and October. You should also stimulate yourself to tackle new financial challenges. The affairs of relatives could take up more of your time than usual. After May, sudden changes might make it difficult to focus on your future. The first week of June and all of August will be good times to take major strides towards making your dreams come true. Because of your own sensitivity of feeling, amounting almost to mysticism, this year you could be attracted to one or more of the arts and to people who are creative. Something could cause sorrow or loss in matters of friendship and love; therefore you must give yourself time to judge others.

Sagittarius

(Nov 22 - Dec 21)

Anything that affects your status, communication and social interests in the coming year should prove of the greatest importance. All these areas are linked together in a subtle way, with one interacting upon the other. You might often find yourself working free from external supervision. This is a year in which new political techniques and social interests will play an important and beneficial role, and you must be prepared to change your ideology and philosophy to include more positive concepts concerning human rights under the influence of rules and laws. After May you will need to apply tremendous energy toward practical affairs; time management will be the key to success dom. Between March and July, use diplomacy and adherence to the truth to avoid problems arising from misinformation and misrepresentation.

Capricorn

(Dec 22 - Jan 19)

The coming year could prove to be a quick-moving one for you, crowded with events and positively sparkling with the unusual. You can expect your mental capabilities to be greatly enhanced. You will be offered many opportunities to get out of the rut, and you will have every incentive to try your best. Don't let the fear of failure prevent you from accepting new challenges, as you will prove fully capable of handling anything that comes your way. When in conversation, eschew fast talk in favour of smooth, well-considered speech. Your management and organisational skills will likely lead to a promotion, so be prepared to take on the extra responsibility.

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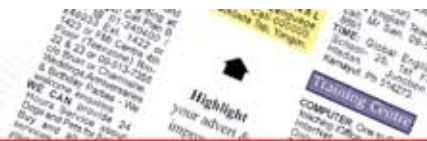
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SOLIDARITES Int'l (SI) is seeking **Administrative & Finance Manager** in Bhamo. Profile Required: University level or equivalent in accounting/management/administration. Previous experience: minimum 2 years in a similar position with NGO. Excellent knowledge of Word and Excel, knowledge of accounting software SAGA & HR software HOMER is a plus. Fluent spoken and written English and Myanmar. Please submit your application (CV, cover letter, references) by email on the following e-mail: hr.solidarites-mm@gmail.com, sol.ygn.hr@gmail.com, recruitment@solidarites-myanmar.org, solidarites-myanmar.org. Closing date: 20th January 2013.

IN FEBRUARY 2013, HelpAge International will start a new EC-funded project entitled "Stronger Myanmar NSAs to promote poverty reduction in old age" for a duration of 42 months. This project will be implemented in 20 villages of Mon and Kayin States and will aim at nurturing 20 community-based organisations in rural areas, which are called Older People Self Help Groups (OPSHGs). The project also has the objective to empower a national NGO, building their management and technical capacity. This national NGO will be the project implementer, under the guidance and coaching from HelpAge. In order to implement this project, HelpAge International in Myanmar is looking for a qualified and experienced Myanmar National to fill in the

following position: Job Title: Project Manager (1 Post) Location: Base in either Mawlamyaing or Hpa-an for 42 months. Qualifications/competencies: University degree preferably in social work, community development or related fields with at least five years community development project management experience with INGOs/ international agencies. Professional experience in project cycle management including participatory planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. Experience in budget planning and financial management. At least 3 years experience in managing staff, and working with expatriates. At least 3 years experience working in partnership with a local organization. Strong familiarity with networking with government, and other national and international agencies.

Proven track record of quality performance in remote locations and high pressure environments. Experience in facilitating training workshops and coaching. Experience in integration of ageing/ cross-cutting issues with livelihood/food security projects would be an advantage. Excellent written and oral communication skills in both English and Myanmar. Strategic, transparent, and flexible in thinking and working process. High degree of initiative and problem solving skills. Basic computer skill essential. Interested and qualified candidates are requested to send a Cover Letter and Curriculum Vitae to the Human Resources Unit of HelpAge International Myanmar Country Office, No 10 Kanbawza Avenue, Shwe-taun-gya Ward No. 1, Bahan Township, Yangon OR by email to hr.helpagemyanmar@gmail.com no later than 5 p.m., Wednesday, 2nd January 2013. Only shortlisted candidates will be notified for interview.

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SOLIDARITES Int'l (SI) is seeking **Deputy Administrative & Finance Manager** in Bhamo. Profile: University level or equivalent in accounting/ management/ administration. 1 years in a similar position with NGO. Excellent knowledge of Word & Excel, knowledge of accounting software SAGA & HR software HOMER is a plus. Fluent spoken and written English and Myanmar. Pls submit application (CV, cover letter, reference) by email to: hr.solidarites-mm@gmail.com, recruitment@solidarites-myanmar.org. Closing date: 31 December 2012.

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Or related proven experience in similar area.). Know ledge of IT management & MS office (excel, word, power point and networking). Fluent in English & Myanmar. Good writing & communication skills. Pls submit application (CV, cover letter, references) to: Win Htay, Logistic Coordinator - Solidarites Int'l office: 44-A, Tharyarwaddy Lane, Bahan, or per email: recruitment@solidarites-myanmar.org & cc to ygn_log.coor@solidarites-myanmar.org.

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submit resume detail to 51, Shwe Hinthar Tower (A), Rm 202, 6½ miles, Pyay Rd, Hlaing, Ph: 502286, 09-732-44378. Form Closing Date: 10.1.2013

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Responsibilities: Able to finalize full Set of Account. Ensure timely monthly management reporting. To manage cash flow and bank reconciliation. Compliance to external audit & tax submission. Ensure compliance to SOP from various locations. If you fit the requirement below, we would like to meet you. Degree in Finance/ Accountancy or equivalent qualification. 2 years experience. Good command in English & Myanmar. Results oriented & performance driven with strong analytical skills. Excellent interpersonal, communication & leadership skills. Multitasking, good communication, administrative, planning & organizational skills are essential. Ability to excel under work pressure. Pls submit CV with 2 recent photos, copies of relevant qualifications, labor registration & copy of NRC to Rm-504, 5th Flr FMI Centre, 380, Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Pabedan. Ph: 240363, 240373, 240393 ext-1524, 09-500-9527.

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Van Persie could have been killed, rages Ferguson

SWANSEA, United Kingdom – Manchester United boss Alex Ferguson claimed Robin van Persie could have been killed after the Dutch striker was hit on the back of the head with the ball in the 1-1 draw against Swansea.

Ferguson vented his fury at the 75th-minute incident at the Liberty Stadium that led to Ashley Williams and van Persie being booked.

Having been upended on the edge of the penalty area, van Persie flew at Williams and had to be restrained by his team-mates after the Wales defender hit him flush on the back of the head with the ball.

Ferguson later claimed that Williams could have killed his player and demanded that the Football Association take action.

As for the game itself, Michu's 13th goal of the season, after 29 minutes, cancelled out Patrice Evra's 16th-minute header from van Persie's corner in the December 23 clash.

"Van Persie could have been killed. The FA has got to look into it," said Ferguson.

"Irrespective of him [Williams] having a yellow card, he should be banned for a long time because that was the most dangerous thing I've seen on a football field for many, many years.

"It was absolutely deliberate, absolutely no question. The whistle has gone, the game has stopped, and he's done that right in front of the referee [Michael Oliver], a foot from the player.

"He could have really killed the lad. It was a disgraceful act by the player. He should be banned for a long, long time."

The United manager was also less than pleased with Wayne Rooney, who

was substituted in the 78th minute after a lacklustre display.

"He didn't play well, it's as simple as that," said the Scot, who added his team should have cantered to a victory which would have restored their six-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

"It's unbelievable we didn't win the match," said Ferguson.

"It was a great performance in the second half. If I had a criticism, it was that the final ball let us down. We missed two or three great opportunities, but I have no criticism about the performance. It was very good."

There were no complaints from Swansea manager Michael Laudrup, who lavished praise on the way his side battled back to level the game.

He said: "They started better than us. They scored and they had a five to 10-minute spell when they could have scored a second.

"We came back and equalised and I thought the first half was equal. It was more of an open game in the second half and it could have gone either way.

"They had more chances than us, but that's normal for a side that's top of the table. It's a great point for the players and the club.

"I heard we showed too much respect for them last season, but that certainly wasn't the case this year."

On the incident between Williams and van Persie, Laudrup said: "I did not see it at the time as there were a lot of players involved, but I saw it afterwards.

"I don't think he [Ferguson] meant literally killing him. Things happen in a game and I am sure Ashley and van Persie shook hands at the final whistle and we move on." – AFP



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

Singapore beat luckless Thais to AFF Suzuki Cup

BANGKOK – Singapore lifted the AFF Suzuki Cup for a record fourth time with a 3-2 aggregate win over Thailand, who could only muster a 1-0 second leg victory in Bangkok on December 22 despite dominating the game.

Singapore took a two-goal advantage over Thailand and clung on despite near-relentless pressure from the spirited home side, which were left to rue their dismal 1-3 first leg loss in the city-state three days earlier.

Desperate to make amends, Thailand's War Elephants threw everything at the visitors, with a bullet header from Kirati Keawsombut just before half-time giving them hope of securing a victory in front of fevered home support.

But they could not find a second goal to take the game into extra-time, with Singapore's defence resolute in the face of wave after wave of Thai attacks.

It was an impressive third cup victory for their coach Radojko Avramovic, who guided Singapore to the 2004 and 2007 titles.

But he will inevitably face criticism for negative tactics despite a pre-match vow to go for the jugular in Thailand.

In reality his side barely registered a shot in the Supachalasai Stadium and were guilty of blatant time-wasting throughout as they set out to defend their lead.

"In the end we deserved to win, because we scored three goals," an unrepentant Avramovic said after the game, which will be his last in charge.

"It was a long, hard campaign. Thailand were not the losers today, we won at home and they won here, but the difference is that we had some luck."

Baihakki Khaizan, who scored the killer third goal in Singapore on December 19, starred for the visitors, making a series of key blocks and headers at the heart of the defence to keep the plucky Thai front line – including the prolific Teerasil Dangda – at bay.

He was helped by his goalkeeper Izwan Mahbud, who made a vital save minutes from the end after substitute Chanathip Songkrasin slalomed into the box before unleashing a shot which would have taken the final into added time.

"They all gave 100 percent but it was just not quite enough. I don't

like to come to second but I'm proud of it," said Thailand's German coach Winfried Schafer.

"This team was fantastic and everybody can see Thailand has enough talent."

Thailand, which has been runners-up three times in the last four years, probed throughout the first-half without making a breakthrough, hitting the bar and frequently finding space out wide to cross into the packed box.

Kirati's goal came after 15 minutes of pressure, powering in a header from a right side corner which sparked delirium in the stands as a giant Thai tricolour cascaded down one stand and smoke from flares wafted over the pitch.

But they could not find the second despite the jinking runs of Jakkapan Pornsai, or the pin-point crossing of Piyaphon Buntao from right midfield.

Ultimately the Lions had their dominant first-leg performance to thank for their historic win, with goals from Mustafic Fahrudin, Khairul Amri and Khaizan leaving Thailand with too much to do. – AFP

THE CRIME JOURNAL

လုပ်ငန်းခွင် ဘာသာပြန်သင်တန်းများ အလိုရှိသည့်

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Hillsborough single tops charts

LONDON – A charity single for the families of those killed in the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, featuring Paul McCartney and Robbie Williams, has claimed Britain's coveted Christmas number one spot, officials announced last week.

The Justice Collective's cover version of "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother", originally a hit for The Hollies in 1969, sold more than 269,000 copies, the Official Charts Company said on December 23.

Funds raised from sales will go towards meeting the families' ongoing legal costs.

The performers include Melanie C, Shane MacGowan, Mick Jones, Gerry Marsen, Paul Heaton, Holly Johnson, Beverley Knight, Paloma Faith and Peter Hooton.

Ex-Liverpool manager

Kenny Dalglish and former captain Alan Hansen also appear.

Some 96 Liverpool fans were crushed to death in the Hillsborough football stadium disaster in Sheffield, northern England, in April 1989. It was the worst sporting disaster in British history.

The fatal crush was caused by huge overcrowding on a terrace before an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest.

On December 19, the High Court in London quashed accidental death verdicts delivered in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy and called for fresh inquests to be held, while police also launched a new investigation.

The move followed the publication of a damning

independent report in September that concluded that 41 of those who died would have had the "potential to survive" if they had received medical treatment more quickly.

The Hillsborough Independent Panel report also found that police tried to divert blame for the tragedy on to the victims.

McCartney has appeared on seven Christmas number ones before – four with The Beatles, two as part of Band Aid and one with Wings – while Melanie C has appeared on three with the Spice Girls and Williams has been on two.

The song edged out "Impossible" by James Arthur, who won this year's edition of television talent contest "The X Factor".

– AFP

After Armstrong, cyclists left to pick up pieces

MILAN – Credited with one of the greatest comebacks in sport, the Tour de France icon that was Lance Armstrong finished 2012 with a reputation as arguably its greatest fraud.

By the end of yet another turbulent year, Bradley Wiggins joined Australian track star Anna Meares, Sir Chris Hoy and Dutchwoman Marianne Vos in offering some cheer to a sport left in disarray by a monumental PR disaster.

Wiggins, the down-to-earth Londoner with a keen eye for music and the “Mod” culture of the Sixties, followed his historic Tour de France triumph by winning Olympic time trial gold at his home Olympics.

“I cannot put it into words. I wouldn’t do it justice,” Wiggins said. The win was his fourth Olympic gold, having previously taken three on the track for Britain.

As a federal investigation into Armstrong and his former team US Postal appeared to stall, other, more deserving champions emerged with Slovakian Peter Sagan winning three stages at the Tour de France, where he beat British sprint king Mark Cavendish to the coveted green jersey.

Cavendish, who in October was succeeded as world champion by Belgium’s Philippe Gilbert, failed in his bid for Olympic road race gold, won in stylish fashion by controversial Kazakhstani rider Alexandre Vinokourov.

Britain, however, went on to make amends by winning seven of the 10 events at the London velodrome.

Sir Chris Hoy won two from the team sprint and keirin while Victoria Pendleton ended her career by losing her sprint title to Meares.

The 36-year-old Scot cried tears



Lance Armstrong during the fifth stage of the 2004 Tour de France. Pic: AFP

of joy as he, too, waved goodbye to the Games with a sixth gold that saw him surpass former rower Sir Steve Redgrave to become Britain’s most successful Olympic champion.

“This is the perfect end to my Olympic career,” said Hoy.

While Wiggins stands next in line for a possible knighthood, Armstrong will go down as the cancer survivor who cheated his way to global stardom and success and was brought down without failing a dope test.

The American maintains his yellow jersey victories were won cleanly, but as the list of former

teammates confessing to drug-taking and/or seeing Armstrong take drugs grew, so did the case against the American.

Finally, the United State Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) charged the American with a number of serious doping offences.

When Armstrong announced on August 24 he would not contest those charges, the USADA virtually stripped him of his seven yellow jersey titles – a decision ratified by the International Cycling Union (UCI), which also annulled all his career results since August 1, 1998.

“Lance Armstrong has no place in

cycling. He deserves to be forgotten in cycling,” said UCI president Pat McQuaid.

The collateral damage since that landmark decision has been substantial.

More former associates of Armstrong confessed to doping, an honorary university degree bestowed on the American was rescinded, and sponsors – including sportswear giant Nike – dropped Armstrong like a hot potato.

The fall-out continued outside the American’s circle with former associates being sacked or resigning from their posts after the murky

past they had hidden behind finally caught up.

Then came calls for McQuaid to resign despite his predecessor, Hein Verbruggen, holding the UCI reins during Armstrong’s reign. McQuaid remains in the sights of Greg LeMond, a former three-time champion and now the only American winner of the Tour de France.

Calling McQuaid and Verbruggen “the corrupt part of the sport”, LeMond added: “The problem for sport is not drugs but corruption. You are the epitome of the word corruption.”

LeMond has since launched a campaign to take over the UCI, a move McQuaid – who was instrumental in introducing a pioneering blood passport scheme which is widely considered an efficient deterrent to cheating – has slapped down.

“I find it a little bit arrogant for him to say he is prepared to serve as interim president of the UCI,” McQuaid said of LeMond.

“The UCI is a democracy, there is an electoral system in place.”

Whether their spat continues into next season remains to be seen. But stakeholders will be looking for guarantees there will be no repeat of an unprecedented scandal which also prompted the Dutch bank Rabobank to end its 17-year sponsorship of its pro team.

For riders, meanwhile, it means their achievements could be shrouded in doubt for years to come.

“We’re the ones picking up the pieces and having to convince people that the sport is clean,” said Wiggins.

“And it’s difficult to convince some people, it really is, because of a precedent that has been set.”

– AFP

Despite huge growth, Asian golf has problems

SINGAPORE – Rapid growth has made Asia the big new destination for world golf but there’s an unmistakable sense of gloom as long-standing events face an uncertain future and local talent stalls.

While rich tournaments and even richer stars continue to flood east, grabbing widespread attention and making large sums for the game’s elite, for the home-grown scene it’s a different story entirely.

A bitter turf war between two rival circuits, which has spooked sponsors and divided players, shows little sign of easing, and Asian golfers are making slow progress on the world stage with just nine listed in the top 100.

China, the great new market with an ever-increasing number of courses and recreational players, is developing at a glacial rate in competitive terms with only three men ranked among the world’s best 800.

Asia’s inter-circuit rivalry even ended up before the courts with four struggling players, who were fined and suspended by the Asian Tour for taking part in OneAsia events, winning a restraint of trade case in Singapore.

Meanwhile traditional cornerstone events are facing trouble. Prize money at the venerable Hong Kong Open was slashed to just US\$2 million, and organisers went cap-in-hand for government funds to pay appearance fees for top players.

The Singapore Open, touted as “Asia’s Major” and its oldest national open dating back to 1961, lost title sponsor Barclays and is missing from next year’s European schedule, with its future date and backers unclear.

While those events hit hard times, the European and American tours remain in a powerful position with a series of big, multi-million dollar tournaments that remain the season’s highlights.

The CIMB Classic in Malaysia, headlined this year by Tiger Woods, will become a full-status PGA Tour event next season – and with just 10 Asian Tour players in the field, according to current plans.

The WGC-HSBC Champions, which featured just nine winners of Asian Tour events and four Chinese players at its last edition in November, has signed on for a five-year stint in Shanghai with Major-level prize money of

\$8.5 million.

The European Tour also bypassed both the Asian Tour and OneAsia by co-sanctioning the \$7.1 million BMW Masters, a much-criticised exhibition tournament when it emerged last year, with China’s domestic circuit.

But the year’s most talked-about event, China’s “Duel at Jinsha Lake”, was unsanctioned, featured only Woods and Rory McIlroy and was over in just one day of spectator mayhem and gratuitous displays of wealth by the organisers.

Perhaps not surprisingly, local players barely figured at the top tournaments and out of five European and PGA-backed events since late October, only three Asians, in total, finished in the top 10, and none in the top five.

And among Asia’s top performers this year, several, including Asian Tour merit winner Thaworn Wiratchant, and Thongchai Jaidee and Jeev Milkha Singh, who won the Wales and Scottish opens respectively, are in their forties.

However, those victories also show it’s not all bleak for Asian golf.

In June, Beijing-born Florida resident Andy Zhang played the US Open

at just 14, and China’s Guang Tianlang, who is the same age and also trains frequently in the United States, is set to break the US Masters age record next year.

Asians continue to dominate the women’s game with four of the top five players, including world number one Yani Tseng and Park In-Bee, the highest earner on this year’s US LPGA tour.

And just this month, Naomichi “Joe” Ozaki’s Asia team won the Royal Trophy in a play-off against a European side led by Jose Maria Olazabal, who masterminded September’s famous Ryder Cup victory.

The men in charge of Asia’s rival tours both insist that the future is bright and that the trajectory, despite admitted problems, remains upward.

Asian Tour executive chairman Kyi Hla Han said his organisation provides the “right balance” of tournaments to nurture players, adding in an email: “We are confident the future of professional golf in the region is secure.”

OneAsia chairman and commissioner Sang Y Chun called Asia’s development “alarmingly strong”, and even held out the possibility of working



Chapchai Nirat of Thailand in action during the second round of the Iskandar Johor Open in Johor Bahru on December 16. Pic: AFP

with the Asian Tour to bring the region on to a more equal footing with Europe and the PGA.

However for some observers, the current situation is very different from the high hopes of nearly 20 years ago, when the Asian Tour first came into being.

“Some people on all sides are claiming they’re working for the

betterment of golf and in fact they’re doing no such thing,” Spencer Robinson, managing editor of *Asian Golf Monthly*, said last month.

“You just want to shake these guys, pick them up by the ears and bash their heads together and say, ‘For Christ’s sake, there’s a big enough pie. Let’s all sit down and work together.’”

– AFP



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

UEFA lodges appeal against its own fine

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

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

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

It added: "As per the UEFA Disciplinary

Regulations, the UEFA disciplinary inspector has the right to open disciplinary investigations and to lodge appeals against decisions taken by the Control and Disciplinary Body.

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

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

Scuffles also broke out between players, coaches and supporters at the end of the match. In addition to the fine, two of Serbia's coaching staff and four players were

handed suspensions while two England players were also banned.

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

Ferdinand, writing on Twitter, had commented: "uefa are not serious at all. They have zero impact on federations/clubs/fans/players. #fact."

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

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

—AFP



Good as gold

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



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