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EITI fallout looms for govt over death at Letpadaung

WA LONE
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CIVIL society groups have accused the government of breaching its Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative commitments as a result of recent clashes between demonstrators and police at the Letpadaung copper mine in which one person was killed and nine injured.

The Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability said its members would submit the case to the EITI Board, which is considering the government's applications for membership to the initiative.

In a statement on December 24, MATA said the government had violated its promise to guarantee freedom on speech on natural resource-related issues. Articles in state-run media blaming the protesters for the violence before an investigation had been conducted also breached the EITI code of conduct, said MATA, which was formed earlier this year to coordinate civil society involvement in the EITI process.

The group said the aim of the EITI was to achieve "people-centred good resource governance" and protect communities from the "resource curse".

"However, the present situation is moving in the opposite direction and the conflict in Letpadaung this week [is an] indication of this," it said.

MORE ON NEWS 3 & 4

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PHOTO: ZARNI PHYO

No confidence: Voters shun Yangon municipal election

Residents of Kyauktada township cast votes in the Yangon City Development Committee election at a polling station on Mahabandoola Garden Street on December 27. Just a trickle of voters entered polling stations around the city throughout the day – and many confessed that they knew nothing about any of the candidates on the ballot forms.

Former CEO questions future of Air Mandalay

Grounded carrier may lack finances to get back in the air, former boss says, but Air Mandalay's management insists it is on track for a February relaunch. BUSINESS 19

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Union Day peace plan

Negotiators are aiming to sign a long-awaited nationwide ceasefire deal on Union Day ahead of political dialogue.

BUSINESS 25

Surprise inclusions on top taxpayer list

Kanbawza Bank tops the list of taxpaying companies for 2013-14, as other well-known firms jostle for position with several new faces.

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online editor **Kayleigh Long** |
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THE INSIDER: The local lowdown & best of the web

Travel like a 'Company' man
If you're travelling for the holidays and were hoping to avoid uncomfortable or tense encounters with airport security, the US Central Intelligence Agency and WikiLeaks have intercepted your prayers.

On December 21, the hacktavist website released a PDF document entitled "Surviving Secondary," a CIA document from 2011 which offers many pages of advice for deep-cover agents on how to get through security checks when arriving in EU airports, so-called secondary screenings, without blowing their cover.

One hopes that the agency did not pay "The Identity and Travel Intelligence Program" too much for the study, as much of it is fairly common sense. "Foreign airports use cameras and undercover officers to identify passengers displaying unusually nervous behavior," the report advises on page 7.

Some of the advice is quite novel, such as making Twitter or Foursquare accounts to back up a cover identity.

Page 14 of the document contains a somewhat alarming anecdote from the case files of a veteran agent.

"When officials swiped the officer's bag for traces of explosives, it tested positive, despite the officer's extensive precautions ... language difficulties led the local security officials to conclude that the traveler was being evasive and had trained in a terrorist camp."

Despite these red flags, "Eventually, the security officials allowed him to rebook his flight and continue on his way."

The authors of the report credit the agent's success to the fact that he expertly stuck by his established cover story.

Say, you don't think the agent was a white guy, do you?

Page 2 asks, "What is YOUR resolution for 2015?"

Ex-Senior General Than Shwe
"Drop my new album: 'Beats by Shwe'"

MP Daw Aung Sun Suu Kyi
"Rule of law!"

Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann
"Update my enemies list."

Once was Burma...

From 'The Myanmar Times' archives

Photograph showing the mass rally in 1945 in Maha Bandoola Park at which Bogyoke Aung San spoke. The Sule Pagoda and the City Hall are seen in the background.

Hla Yin Kyae
for *NOW!* Magazine.
Photo: Pyay Han (ColorMax)

Style Statement
NOW!

Negotiators target Union Day signing

Long-awaited ceasefire could be signed as early as February 12, peace teams say

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U Aung Min speaks during peace talks in Yangon on December 23. Photo: Wa Lone

PEACE negotiators say they expect to sign a controversial nationwide ceasefire agreement on February 12, 2015, following two days of negotiations in Yangon last week.

The signing date is far from certain, however, as a number of key figures on both sides were absent from last week's meeting. A further round of negotiations is planned for mid-January, the delegations said at the conclusion of the meeting.

The proposed date is highly symbolic, however, as it marks the 68th anniversary of the signing of the Panglong Agreement between General Aung San and ethnic minority leaders. The anniversary is marked each year as Union Day.

The announcement came after representatives of the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), which is negotiating on behalf of 16 armed ethnic groups, held talks at the Myanmar Peace Center on December 22 and 23.

'I think we have enough consensus to move to the next step, which is political dialogue.'

U Aung Min
Chief government peace negotiator

The talks were given added urgency because of concerns that the peace process could be disrupted by political campaigning in the lead-up to next year's election if not completed in the first half of next year.

But Minister for the President's Office U Aung Min, who led the government delegation, said the elections were not the only potential distraction next year.

"We have a number of priority issues that we need to take care of next year, including the elections, so let's conclude the [nationwide ceasefire agreement]," he said at the opening of the meeting. "I think we have enough consensus to move to the next step, which is political dialogue."

Negotiators focused on the 16 as-yet unfinalised points in the draft ceasefire, which, if signed, would pave the way for political dialogue and ultimately an end to Myanmar's ethnic conflicts.

They also discussed the recent Tatmadaw artillery attack on a Kachin Independence Army military academy near its Laiza headquarters that left 23 people dead, as well as a number of other issues raised by the NCCT.

Both sides said they reached agreement on most outstanding sections of the ceasefire but would need confirmation from their respective leaders before holding the signing ceremony.

"We have reached agreement on almost of all points. We both expect to sign the agreement on Union Day," NCCT delegation leader Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win told reporters after the talks. "If we could sign it that day it would be a historic day of our country. Both sides are trying to achieve that."

He said that after consulting with their respective leaders the negotiators would head back to the table in January to finalise the ceasefire.

"I hope the agreements we have got will be approved at the next talks," Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win said.

Under the terms of the agreement, the two sides will have 60 days to finalise the framework for political dialogue, and dialogue must begin within 90 days. If the agreement is signed on Union Day, political dialogue would likely begin in May.

U Hla Maung Shwe from the Myanmar Peace Center said it was important talks begin as soon as possible. "We need to speed up the peace process to hold political dialogue," he said.

The NCCT also proposed the holding of a meeting with representatives from the Tatmadaw and armed ethnic groups in the Kachin State capital Myitkyina prior to the next round of talks.

Ethnic leaders said the meeting is needed to help prevent further outbreaks of fighting like the November 19 attack on the KIA military academy. The government said it would reply to the NCCT request in early January.

CONTINUED FROM NEWS 1

It said the police had used "excessive and unnecessarily violent" tactics to quell the demonstrations.

"The police response ... highlights human rights abuses due to mismanagement of natural resources by the respective authorities and foreign investors from extractive industry."

The statement was released after one woman was killed and nine others injured in the latest clashes between police a defending Chinese miner Myanmar Wanbao and protesters at the Letpadaung mine in Sagaing Region's Sarlingyi township on December 22.

The long-running conflict at the copper mine was reignited when the company began using bulldozers to fence off land. Nearby residents quickly gathered and attempted to stop the fencing. A heated standoff then boiled over into rioting, with security forces firing shotgun rounds into protesters to quell the confrontation.

Wanbao spokesperson Mr Dong Yonfei told *The Myanmar Times* on December 23 that he felt "deeply sorry" for this incident but that the company planned to continue its activities. He said Wanbao, which has partnered with army-run Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited on the project, had official permission to carry out the work.

"We already have permission from the government and we will complete our fencing operations in a few days," he said.

The company plans to fence off 3000 of the site's 6000 acres. The state-run *Myanma Ahlin* newspaper reported on December 23 that more than 100 police were part of the security operation. The report said 11 police officers were also injured in the melee, and that the officers fired into the crowd to try and make villagers disperse. The daily newspaper added that some villagers had fired slingshots at the police.

Daw Khin Win, 60, was shot and killed during the riot. She had apparently joined the crowd to inspect land that she had been farming but was not being fenced off by the Chinese mining company, said Daw Khin Mar Aye, a sister-in-law to the deceased.

"I warned her not to go near the project because police were shooting at the villagers who got too close," Daw Khin Mar Aye said.

Villagers were enraged by the sight of bulldozers destroying farmland with crops waiting to be harvested, said Ma Yin Hla from Tone village.

"We cannot do anything except cry," she added.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who headed the Letpadaung Commission and is also chair of the National League for Democracy, issued a statement after the death.

The statement said the latest flare-up in violence at the site, which has seen repeated incidents between police and villagers since November 2012, had occurred because the government and company had failed to follow the suggestions of the commission, which released its report into the project in early 2013.

The statement urged the government to take prompt action to limit further impacts on local villages.

The Letpadaung Commission was formed after a police raid on a protest camp in November 2012 that left scores injured, including monks. Human rights groups said the police had used phosphorous grenades in the night-time crackdown, despite an international ban on their non-military use.

Wanbao issued a statement saying that they have already made agreements to compensate more than 70 percent of villagers for the land they will take for the project.

The Chinese embassy expressed "deep sorrow" at the "unfortunate" clashes and said it was particularly concerned at "the casualties and injuries" suffered by Chinese workers at the site.

"We believe that violence will not help to resolve the problem," it said in a statement. "With regard to the tragedy, we expect further results of investigation by the authority."

Hundreds join MDY protest against mine

Demonstration calls for closure of the Letpadaung mine following protester's death on December 22

ABOUT 500 people including dozens of Buddhist monks protested near the Chinese consulate in Mandalay on December 27 demanding the closure of the Letpadaung copper mine.

It was the largest protest since the fatal shooting of a woman demonstrating against the China-backed mine project in Sagaing Region that has been dogged by complaints of land grabbing and environmental damage.

'We are not against China ... but we are worried that relations between China and Myanmar may be damaged.'

Ko Thein Aung Myint
Protest organiser

Daw Khin Win, in her 50s, was killed on December 22 when police opened fire on protesters trying to stop the mine company building a fence in territory disputed with local farmers.

The mine – run by Chinese firm Wanbao as part of a joint venture with army-owned Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited – has raised questions about Myanmar's reliance on investment from neighbouring China, which gave crucial political support to the military regime.

"We want the truth of what happened in Letpadaung as [Daw] Khin Win was killed. We want the authorities to take appropriate action," said Ko Thein Aung Myint, a protest organiser from Movement for Democracy Current Force.

Small but near-daily protests against Wanbao have been held in Yangon and Mandalay.

"We are not against China. We are neighbours. But we are worried that relations between China and Myanmar may be damaged" by the mine dispute, Ko Thein Aung Myint added.

Mandalay police confirmed the protest, saying hundreds were in attendance but no arrests were made.

Keen to prevent the issue snowballing, Wanbao has recognised the woman's "senseless death" as "painful and poignant", while China's foreign ministry on December 24 also expressed its regret.

The Letpadaung copper mine has triggered several rounds of fierce opposition from local villagers.

In November 2012 a botched police raid using phosphorus on a protest camp near the mine left dozens of people, including monks, with burn injuries. – *AFP*

A Mee Gyaung Kan protester holds a sign outside City Hall. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

Police bring about peaceful end to City Hall land sit-in

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A 12-DAY sit-in protest at Yangon's City Hall over land confiscations in Thingangyun's Mee Gyaung Kan ward came to an end last week when 14 protesters were taken to court 15 hours after a meeting in which police warned of the coming action.

"We took 14 protesters this morning [December 23] to put them on trial. We aren't arresting them. We will send them to the court to face legal proceedings," said Police Lieutenant Colonel Win Kyi, head of police for Yangon's western district.

Protester Daw Aye Mi confirmed that the group had been taken to Kyauktada Township Court, and that they had been told by police that bail could be granted. She also said the group went willingly, as it had earlier agreed to do.

The protest – the latest of many over the past two years, including a 10-month occupation of an area near City Hall – was launched to demand the return of land confiscated in 1990-91 by the military.

In this latest sit-in, a group of protesters blocked the entrance to City Hall, near Sule Pagoda, starting from 4:15pm on December 12, lighting candles and shouting slogans. They remained there for 12 days until removed by police.

Police Colonel Win Bo, deputy head of police for Yangon Region, said police were acting on a complaint from Yangon City Development Committee that said the protest had stopped YCDC employees from carrying out their duties.

According to sections 340 through 345 of the Penal Code, which cover wrongful confinement, the protesters could face anything from small fines to three years in jail, with the severity of the possible sentence increasing according to the length of the alleged confinement.

"The longer their protest, the larger their [possible] punishment," said Pol Col Win Bo.

He added, however, that the government "democratically allows peaceful assembly and peaceful procession now" and would help them to settle their case in court "systematically".

Over the past 10 months, the group said, they have sent complaint letters to the President's Office and met Pyithu Hluttaw MPs to no avail. Protesters told *The Myanmar Times* they were unsure whether their blockade in front of Yangon City Hall breached the law.

"No one explained to us that it breaks the law. But ... if the government wants to take legal action, do it on all of us. We only know that we are asking them to give back our confiscated lands because the new government is open and transparent," said protester Daw Khin Khin Win.

"We believe that authorities from different departments are there [at City Hall] and they will help us to solve our problem if we tell them about our confiscated lands ... We did it with the thought that we will accept if we are arrested." – *Translation by Thiri Min Htun and Emoon*

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WATCH FEATURED SUBJECT TO STOCK AVAILABILITY

YCDC graft complaints go into cyberspace

KYAW PHONE KYAW
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CORRUPT Yangon City Development Committee officials can now be reported through a newly launched website, www.ycdc.gov.mm.

U Cho Tun Aung, chief of YCDC's department of public relations and communications, announced the move earlier this month. The website is part of the committee's e-government push, which is aimed at reducing paperwork and red tape.

He said complaints can be filed by clicking on the "Contact" tab and then selecting "Suggestion" on the drop-down menu. Doing so will result in a direct report to YCDC.

But he said residents could also report things that need to be fixed, such as broken water pipes and uncollected trash, and suggested they accompany their email with photos.

"Anyone can write to us with good advice or anything else they want. We will reply rapidly," U Cho Tun Aung said. "We will submit messages to the YCDC secretary or to the mayor directly, and action will be taken swiftly when required.

"Complaints about specific individuals will not be passed to officials at other levels but directly reported to the secretary or mayor."

Since first launching a website in 2013, the committee has received an average of about 10 letters a month, an official said, adding that those letters received an email or phone response.

Officials were unable to say how many letters had been received in total or how many complaints had been resolved.

U Aye Min, a candidate for a position on YCDC in the December 27 election, said the complaint system was a positive start and had "good potential".

However, he said he had concerns about shifting too many services online. "E-government is only good for IT-friendly people, it's not for everybody. There must be other ways to report corruption," he added.

About K1.7 billion has been spent on the e-government initiative since 2011.

IN PICTURES

A worker sweeps in front of a parade ground recently developed for Independence Day celebrations on January 4. The site, built between the president's house and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw at a cost of K6.4 billion by ACE Construction, will be used for a military parade overseen by President U Thein Sein. It will be the first time the military has saluted a civilian political leader since an Independence Day ceremony in 1961 that was attended by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. – *Htoo Thant*

CRIME IN BRIEF

Man electrocuted while cutting branches
A man from Yangon's Thanlyin township has died after being electrocuted while cutting branches from a tree. U Zin Lin Han, 56, from Upper Thelphyu Chaung village, died on December 18 after climbing a horseradish tree in which an electrical wire had become tangled.

Bus driver caught with fake licence
A bus driver on the 124 North District line has been caught driving with a fake licence, police say. The man from Shwe Pyi Thar township was caught during a routine police stop in Lanmadaw township on December 17. He is being prosecuted for cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property.

Korean killed in motorbike crash
A South Korean man died in a motorbike accident on Taw Win Road in Shwe Pyi Thar township on December 20, police say. Kim Yeon Soo, 59, was severely injured while riding a motorcycle when he was hit by another cyclist. He later died at Insein Hospital. Shwe Pyi Thar police have charged the driver of the other motorcycle with causing death by negligence.

Bus conductor dies after fall
A bus conductor died on December 17 after falling out of his vehicle on Yangon's Insein Road.

Ko Zaw Min, 42, died at the scene from injuries sustained the in the fall. Police are investigating whether to charge the 25-year-old driver, from Tharyarwady township in Bago Region, with causing death through negligence.

Indian men arrested over alleged ATM fraud
Four Indian men have been arrested for allegedly withdrawing money from ATMs using fake credit cards in November, according to police. The K1.4 million was withdrawn in four transactions from a Kanbawza Bank ATM on Shwebontha Road in Pabedan township, police said.

Pabedan police apprehended four men aged 25 to 32 along with 52 fake debit and credit cards on December 20. A fifth man is still wanted by police.

– *Toe Wai Aung, translation by Khant Lin Oo*


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Dismal turnout blights Yangon municipal vote

Candidates blame lack of government support for low awareness, interest in first municipal poll in 60 years

NOE NOE AUNG KYAW PHONE KYAW

A Yangon resident casts a vote for a township-level candidate at a polling station on December 27. Photo: Zarni Phyo

AS he slowly emerged from the polling station on Mahabandoola Garden Street in Kyauktada township, U Maung Ni, 80, shielded his eyes from the midday sun.

He was the first person in almost half an hour to cast a vote at the station in Yangon's municipal election on December 27.

For him, voting simply meant choosing the candidate who appeared the least-worst option.

"It was a snap decision. I just ticked the box next to the one I thought would not be too bad," said the 80-year-old former general manager of army-owned Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited.

U Maung Ni had just voted for seven candidates, including one representative on Yangon City Development Committee, and three each for district- and township-level positions.

A total of 115 positions were open to elected candidates, including four on YCDC, three for each of the city's four districts and three for each township. At the district and township levels, candidates were divided into three categories – community leaders, experts and civil society – and voters had to select one from each.

U Maung Ni said that he was unsure what the candidates would be able to achieve in office but voted out of a sense of duty.

"This is a kind of election, so citizens have a duty to vote. But the candidates are not really in touch with the public so I didn't know who to choose," he added.

He was one of dozens of people that *The Myanmar Times* met before and after they went to vote on December 27. Like U Maung Ni, all said the names and photos on the ballot form meant little to them.

"I just chose the candidates based on their photo," admitted Daw Khin Myint Ye, a 58-year-old resident of Bahan township.

The lack of familiarity with the candidates – largely the result of a ban on political party members from taking part – was one of a number of factors that dampened turnout.

Voting opened at 6am and throughout the morning just a trickle of people wandered in and out of polling stations. By the early afternoon, most stations had received just a few dozen voters out of the hundreds registered to cast a ballot. If anything, fewer voters turned up as the day went on.

"More than 30 people have voted out of the 294 on the roll," said an electoral official from the Mahabandoola Garden Street polling station.

There were few reports of irregularities, with some voters praising station officials for explaining to them how to fill out their ballot forms according to the rules.

While some candidates had encouraged the public to vote in order to bring reform to a municipal body often criticised for its lack of transparency and poor service delivery, many people appeared more interested in watching the Myanmar Academy Awards ceremony, which began in the afternoon.

Ma Thu Thu Aung, 28, from Yankin township said she did not vote because she knew none of the candidates.

"I only saw one pamphlet distributed during the campaign period," she said. "The other reason I didn't vote is because I don't think [the election] will have any effect on the city."

She said she was so disinterested that she had even forgotten it was election day.

"To be honest, I just knew that the Academy Awards were on today," she added.

Many of the city's 5.2 million residents could not have voted even if they wanted to, however. The election was limited to one person from each household, and only 401,000 of an estimated 870,000 households were eligible due to strict residency criteria.

Still, this was better than the committee's original proposal that just 1.5 percent of the population – handpicked by the YCDC election commission – be allowed to vote, in order to save money.

U Win Cho, a western district candidate for YCDC, said the authorities had never intended for the election to be competitive.

"This election was originally created as a façade," he said. "But because of some MPs – especially [Yangon Region Hluttaw representative] Daw Nyo Nyo Thin – they changed their decision to allow more people to vote."

In addition to the low turnout, errors were reported on some electoral rolls. An official from a polling station in Sayar San North ward in Bahan township said some eligible voters were left off the roll.

"One had a household member list [form 66/6] but when he came here, his name was not on the roll so he had to go back. There have been three or four people like this so far," he said.

YCDC election commission member U Myint Thein Soe refused to comment on the reasons for the poor turnout.

"We can only say that the result and the number of voters will be released 48 hours [after the election]. Why people have chosen not to vote is simply up to them. They will have their reasons. It is too early to speculate," he said.

Some candidates, however, took aim at the government for failing to educate voters about the election.

"I am not satisfied to see just a few voters at each booth," said U Thein Win, an expression of disappointment and frustration etched on his face. "I don't blame the people though. The state-run newspapers did nothing to support this election."

Mingalardon residents cast votes and check electoral rolls. Photos: Aung Htay Hlaing

Fast facts: YCDC election

Yangon population:	5.2 million
Households:	Over 870,000
Eligible voters:	401,634
Polling stations:	1086
Constituencies:	115, including 4 for YCDC, 12 for district committees, 99 for township committees
Candidates:	293

"Just look at this," the YCDC candidate for Yangon's western district said as he gestured toward the polling booth.

"Nobody is coming to vote. The township or ward administrative offices should be doing something to motivate and remind people to vote, like going around with loudspeakers."

U Win Cho estimated that less than 40pc of those eligible had voted in his district. He attributed this to a lack of faith both in YCDC and elections more generally, the latter because of the poor performance of hluttaw representatives elected in 2010.

"One reason [for the poor turnout] is that people voted for hluttaw representatives to work for them four years ago but there is no obvious result from it," he said. "That's why people do not have any faith in elections."

Ward, village law could disrupt elections: activists

Activists fear local administrators could use law – and threat of a six-month jail term – to block political activities

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NLD supporters attend a party rally in May. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

A LOCAL administration law passed in 2012 is being used to stifle political activities and could affect campaigning for next year's elections, activists say. People who organise protests without official permission could be sent to jail under the statute, known as the Ward and Village-tract Administration Law.

Event organisers say local administrators ask intrusive questions, impose restrictions or ban activities outright, and have warned that in some areas tensions between activists and administrators are at boiling point.

"These restrictions mostly occur in rural areas," said U Aung Myo Min, the director of Equality Myanmar. "Our country still has many laws to suppress political activities – laws that are inconsistently applied."

The act obliges residents to apply for permission to host events and celebrations, or to use loudspeakers in public, and they must conform to restrictions imposed by the local authorities. Government departments are exempt from the law.

The act covers political events that do not fall under the peaceful protest law or election campaign rules.

Ko Tharr Htway, the leader of Pan Yaet Lann, a band that promotes human rights and is backed by the National League for Democracy, said his group faced legal action under the law because it used loudspeakers without permission when hosting performances in Magwe Region in 2012.

But the law is also used in urban areas, he said.

"In [Yangon's] Insein township, the ward administrators stopped the event under that law," he said.

In another case, the head of the NLD branch for Yangon's northern district, U Khin Maung Shein, was charged under the law in June for an event in Hlaing Tharyar township held as part of the party's campaign to amend section 436 of the constitution.

The law, enacted by Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in 2012, provides for up to six months' imprisonment or a K50,000 fine for failure to seek permission for organising an event.

But the administrator for Hlaing Tharyar's No 13 ward, U Aung Ko Htet, said the law was difficult for local officials to implement and in most cases they did not intervene, even when permission had not been sought.

"A political party meeting with five people can be said to be a political event. How can I charge them for holding a meeting of five people? It is difficult. Even though the law says I should, I personally don't want to do it," he said.

"Generally we go and interrupt the event and ask them to get permission. If they either stop the event or ask permission before resuming, it is okay."

The law also mandated the holding of elections for 2891 ward and 13,698 village-tract administrator posts.

While these elections took place in December 2012 and January 2013, a report compiled by the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society suggests the elections were highly flawed.

While the report surveyed only 69 ward and village-tract administrator elections – across all 14 states and regions – it found that only 38 percent could be considered successful, with others being abandoned for lack of information, lack of candidates or public indifference. In these cases, the incumbent administrator, or another chosen by community leaders or the township administrator, was appointed.

While the law states that administrators must not have links to political parties, the survey also found that most administrators are aligned with a political party or group.

Twenty-nine percent of administrators were strongly backed by the National League for Democracy, while 9pc were supported by ethnic parties or armed groups. The remaining 62pc were linked to the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party.

While the elections attracted little interest at the time, the power of local administrators has become clearer over the past two years. The report warned that this power could significantly affect the freedom and fairness of next year's elections.

'Our country still has many laws to suppress political activities – laws that are inconsistently applied.'

U Aung Myo Min
Equality Myanmar

"Our political rights depend on the decision of a ward administrator," said Ko Nyan Linn, a public relations officer at the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society.

"We saw several examples in the by-elections of 2012 and the administrator elections [of administrators stifling political activities] but competition will be more intense in 2015."

Activists say friction with administrators is already high. "According to our experience, the freedom of political events now largely depends on the individual authorities and their mindset," said U Ye Aung, of the Former Political Prisoners Society.

"Political events can be held without permission as long as the authorities are informed. They can turn a blind eye. But if they want to suppress such events, they can use the law to do so."

Ward and village-tract administrators work underneath township administrators, who are employed within the Ministry of Home Affairs' General Administration Department. Under Myanmar's constitution, the minister – currently Major General Ko Ko – is a serving military officer directly appointed by the commander-in-chief.

"Giving authority to the lowest level of administration to intervene in political activities is too much," said Ko Aung Myin, a member of Action Committee for Democracy Development. "The law also means that political activities are still under the influence of the military."

Activists are urging the government to remove restrictions on political freedom and update the law to avoid potential friction. "Laws and regulations designed to suppress activities promoting democracy and human rights are outdated," said U Aung Myo Min.

U Naing Aung said allowing free political activities could improve relations between the authorities and the people. "The authorities are still bound by old ideas about political activity. Maybe they consider it an infringement on their power. But it's just a way for the people to express themselves."

U Tin Maung Win, a member of the Pyithu Hluttaw Citizens' Rights, Democracy and Human Rights Committee, said he thought the requirement to seek permission was "quite normal" but agreed it could be misused if administrators are not "politically neutral".

"Administrators should permit the activities whenever they are informed about them as political parties and groups are not destroying the country, they want to make the country better," he said.

He said his committee would consider tabling an amendment to the law if it receives a complaint.

"It is worth amending the law so it stipulates administrators must permit political activities."

Alliance warns of military power over peace deal

THE military-dominated National Defence and Security Council could prove to be a roadblock to achieving peace, an ethnic political party alliance says.

The United Nationalities Alliance, a grouping of eight parties, said at a three-day conference last week that the Union Peace-making Work Committee, which is negotiating a nationwide ceasefire on behalf of the government, lacked the authority to offer guarantees to armed ethnic groups.

The group said in a report on the peace process released at a December 22-24 conference in Yangon that it foresaw problems when it puts peace proposals to the NDSC for approval.

The 11-member body contains five serving military personnel, together with the president, the two vice presidents, the two speakers of the national parliament and the foreign minister. Of its current members, only one is not military or ex-military.

The UNA said the government should guarantee the viability of planned political dialogue by either ensuring President U Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing attend or by publicly stating that those taking part in the negotiations have decision-making power.

U Khun Tun Oo, the head of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, said peace could only be achieved if the Tatmadaw changes its mindset toward ethnic armed groups.

He said the Tatmadaw was responsible for the lack of trust between the two sides because it had failed to properly implement earlier ceasefires.

"There's a big difference between holding discussions and making decisions," he said. "Peace can be possible if the military, which is the real decision maker, works together with peace makers with goodwill."

Participants at the conference also discussed the 2008 constitution, with UNA members agreeing to work together with ethnic armed groups, political parties and civil society groups to amend the charter.

UNA member U Aye Tha Aung of the Arakan National Party said the alliance agreed on the need for a democratic federal union system. – *Ye Mon*

Labour ministry plans survey to set minimum wage

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THE Ministry of Labour is planning a survey of the daily cost of living for low-paid workers in 108 townships, it said in a statement last week. The survey will be used to help set a long-delayed minimum wage.

The survey will be conducted in January and February by representatives of the ministry, employers, administration staff and volunteers.

"We will survey five wards in each township and five family units in each ward," said Daw Ei Shwe Zin Nyunt, a Ministry of Labour spokesperson. "We have only two months for the survey and must report back to the ministry with our findings by the end of February."

Workers' rights activists have been pressing the government to set a minimum wage as required under a law enacted in March last year.

The ministry had said it would introduce the minimum wage by the end of this year but getting employers and workers to agree on a fair rate has proven more difficult than expected.

U Thein Win, a director at the Ministry of Labour, said the results of the survey would form the basis for the ministry's recommendation regarding a national minimum wage.

"No deal has been reached regarding a minimum wage despite a lot of meetings between workers' rights activists, employers and the ministry," he said. "We need data before we can support the setting of a minimum wage."

Minister for Labour U Aye Myint said the survey would go beyond looking at the daily cost of living for workers.

"The survey is not only based on living costs but will also look at workplace safety and the kinds of work that people are doing," he said. "But we will be looking to set a minimum wage that is fair to all sides."

The Myanmar Trade Union Federation (MTUF) has described the setting of the minimum wage as a necessary first step in ensuring labour rights and called on the ministry to complete the process by April 2015.

"It's essential to cement some right and conditions for workers as soon as possible," said MTUF chair U Aung Lin.

The Ministry of Labour organised a meeting in late December in Nay Pyi Taw between big employers and labour rights activists at which it asked both sides to suggest a minimum wage, U Aung Lin said. However, no agreement could be reached between the two sides, he added.

"Some labour rights activists wanted to set a minimum daily wage of K7000, which they said is a fair living wage. We think this is impossible but it's also only a part of a package we need to consider. Other things to consider are pensions, experience and [length of] service," he said.

Most employers were happy to agree to an eight-hour work day and a daily wage of K4000 minimum wage. Moreover, some were willing to pay higher wages that amounted to K80,000 or K100,000 a month, notes from the meeting showed.

However, U Aye Tun, the managing director of Aung Thein Than Co, warned that a miscalculation by the ministry could have devastating consequences for employers in some sectors. "The business situation is not yet stable," he said. "The government needs to carefully manage how it sets the minimum wage because we still face a number of major hurdles in accessing the market and producing goods."

2004 TSUNAMI

Myanmar migrant worker Mi Htay poses for a photograph outside her house in Ban Nam Khaem village, Thailand. Mi Htay remains haunted by memories of the children she lost in the tsunami whose bodies, like hundreds of other Myanmar migrants in Thailand, were never identified. Photo: AFP

Migrants haunted by memory of tsunami

An estimated 2000 Myanmar migrants are thought to have perished in Thailand

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A DECADE after towering waves wrenched her newborn baby from her arms, Mi Htay remains haunted by memories of the children she lost in the tsunami whose bodies, like hundreds of other Myanmar migrants in Thailand, were never identified.

No one knows exactly how many foreign labourers died when the tsunami cut into southwestern Thailand, as most lacked official work permits and their relatives did not come forward in the days and weeks after the December 26, 2004, disaster out of fear of arrest or deportation.

An estimated 2000 migrants from Myanmar are thought to have perished – deaths that went almost unnoticed as the television cameras focused on foreign tourists and Thai victims.

Among them were Mi Htay's eight-day-old baby – too young even to have been given a name – and two of her other children, both toddlers, as well as her mother and a nephew.

Despite the aching reminders of her loss, Mi Htay returned around a year later to the small coastal village of Ban Nam Khem, in Thailand's worst-hit Phang Nga province, in search of work in the area's fisheries.

"When I am working, I can forget what happened," the now 40-year-old said, pointing out the spot where the waves pulled her newborn away from her grasp.

"But when I see other families with their children going to eat, I feel so sad. If they were alive, we would be like that. I can't forget it for one day."

In 2006 Mi Htay – whose two oldest children survived the disaster – was informed that the bodies of her mother and nephew had been identified as part of what was, at the time, the biggest global forensic investigation. The Indian Ocean tsunami, which was sparked by the third-largest earthquake on record, claimed more than 220,000 lives in one of the world's deadliest and most geographically widespread disasters.

More than 3000 bodies were identified and returned to families across the world by Thai and international experts in the years after the tsunami using dental records, DNA or fingerprints.

But Mi Htay's three missing children were not among them.

"I presume they are dead. But maybe they are alive as they haven't found the bodies. Maybe they are with other people. I keep thinking like that," she said.

Other than a small sign in Thai pointing to a nearby evacuation shelter, there is little evidence of the tsunami that wiped out nearly half of the village's 5000 people.

The sparsely furnished apartments Myanmar nationals rent from Thais have been rebuilt and the pier is bustling with migrants sliding bucket-loads of freshly caught fish off boats and into factories, where workers like Mi Htay gut fish for around US$10 a day.

'When I see other families with their children going to eat, I feel so sad.'

Mi Htay
Migrant worker who lost three children in the 2004 tsunami

There are more migrant labourers in Phang Nga province than before the tsunami and most are now registered, says U Htoo Chit, director of the Foundation for Education and Development charity.

An estimated 2 million Myanmar nationals work in Thailand, where they make up part of a vast migrant labour force often working in low-paid jobs and poor conditions, subject to exploitation.

U Htoo Chit recalls the difficulty in identifying the decomposing bodies of undocumented victims with no official records, a problem compounded by the mass deportation of more than 2500 migrants in the aftermath of the tsunami.

"Most of [the deported] lost their relatives. They didn't want to come back to Thailand again to claim the dead," he said.

U Htoo Chit estimates that about 1000 Myanmar migrants were killed or missing in Phang Nga alone. Human Rights Watch estimates the overall figure at some 2000 for all six tsunami-hit Thai provinces.

Some of these deaths are accounted for in Thailand's official toll of 5395. The national police forensic department has recorded around 400 people still missing, a quarter from Myanmar.

At the nearby Bang Muang cemetery, 369 bodies lie unidentified beneath concrete headstones labelled simply with serial numbers on laminated cards. Authorities believe the majority are Myanmar nationals but have no DNA samples to check against. The remains of a further 49 Thai nationals lie identified but unclaimed.

At the far end of the graveyard, an empty stainless steel coffin serves as a reminder of the scaled-back – but still ongoing – operation to return corpses. Up until last month it had been the resting place of Nepali tailor Rajan Dhaurali, whose body was identified through a DNA match with his sister two years after he died in neighbouring Khao Lak.

But, without the documents to show he was a Myanmar national, like others in his family who hold Myanmar passports but are Nepali by origin, police refused to release the body, according to the Phuket Thai-Nepali Association.

It helped track down Dhaurali's children and the documents required to retrieve the remains after it was alerted to the case by media outlets ahead of the tsunami anniversary.

At the house where she now works as a live-in nanny in Patong town, his daughter Depa, 20, said her family's deep grief was tinged with relief after finally cremating their father in November.

"I couldn't believe it after 10 years ... It felt bad, but in some ways it's a relief. I would like to find my sister and mother too," Depa said of the two family members who died the same day and whose bodies remain unidentified.

For now she, like Mi Htay, is focused on building her life anew in Thailand, learning to live with unanswered questions as best as she can.

– AFP

Going the last mile on early warning

ON December 26, 2004, the world experienced one of the deadliest natural disasters ever recorded. A 9.1-magnitude earthquake off the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, triggered a massive tsunami that directly affected 14 countries in Asia and Africa. The tectonic shifting of plates and the widespread impact of the resulting waves, led to 230,000 deaths and massive human suffering.

This month, several affected countries in the region will host remembrance ceremonies for the Indian Ocean tsunami. This is an opportunity to raise public awareness in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond on the importance of building greater resilience to natural disasters, and how we can collectively work to maintain this momentum enhancing our capacities to deal with such catastrophic events.

The 2004 tsunami led to an unprecedented global outpouring of support, and a key lesson from the human tragedy was the importance of early warning. When the wave struck, early warning systems were inadequate. As a result, many received no warning except the sight of the wall of water rushing toward them. Our region must never again be caught so unprepared.

In the aftermath, the Asia-Pacific region embarked on a collective effort to develop approaches and mechanisms for better early warning systems to reduce the impact of future disasters. These efforts have intensified over the intervening years in Asia and the Pacific, the most disaster-prone region in the world. Building resilience in this region is not an option but an imperative to safeguard and promote sustainable development, lives and livelihoods.

The Indian Ocean tsunami fundamentally changed how we deal with natural disasters, making a profound impact on policies and budgets as well as operational and technical work. Importantly, the experience of the tsunami shaped the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), which was adopted in Kobe, Japan, weeks after the disaster.

Real progress has been made in implementing the HFA and building Asia-Pacific resilience. Governance has been strengthened, with more than half of Asia-Pacific countries having enacted legislation and created institutions dealing specifically with disaster risk management. The budgetary allocations for disaster risk and mitigation works have been improved, although this varies across countries. Institutional capacities for early warning, preparedness and response have also been strengthened but more must be done. The countries of Asia and the Pacific are redoubling efforts to reinforce implementation capacities, educate vulnerable communities and address underlying risks.

The regional commitment to early warning is reflected in the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation Systems (IOTWS), which became operational in 2011, with Australia, Indonesia and India in charge of issuing regional tsunami bulletins. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) projects that this new system will save an average of 1000 lives each year for the next 100 years.

On April 11, 2012, an earthquake of magnitude 8.6 off the coast of Indonesia provided a useful test of the system. Within 10 minutes of the quake, the countries at risk had received bulletins with tsunami warning information from the three regional service providers. In turn, millions of people received warnings and moved rapidly to higher ground. Fortunately no tsunami was triggered that day, but the experience suggests that real progress has been made since 2004.

At the national level, several countries have also made major investments in early warning systems, including setting up state-of-the-art warning centres, which have contributed to the Asia-Pacific region increasingly being considered a global hub for excellence in this field.

The tsunami also led to the creation of innovative funding mechanisms. Thanks to the Thai government's contribution of US$10 million, the ESCAP Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness was launched in 2005. Pooling resources from multiple donors to strengthen multi-hazard early warning systems, the trust fund has supported 26 projects benefitting 19 Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian countries. The fund supported the establishment of the IOTWS and has provided targeted support to countries facing high risks but with limited national capacity.

Despite this progress we must not forget the importance of local-level, community-based risk reduction. This "last mile" of early warning systems – the vulnerable communities at risk – remains a critical gap in need of additional attention and resources. It must be a high priority to ensure that the most vulnerable communities receive timely and understandable warnings that they know how to act upon in times of crisis.

Working together to reduce disaster risk and build resilience is comparable to pushing a big rock uphill together – if we do not constantly move forward, we risk sliding backward.

So 10 years on, how much better prepared is the Asia-Pacific region for a major tsunami? Considerably better than we were in 2004, but the full answer will only be known one day in the future, during the first few hours after a strong earthquake has caused a new tsunami. To prepare for that day, regional cooperation is essential, especially in early warning, as natural hazards know no borders.

Working together to reduce disaster risk and build resilience is comparable to pushing a big rock uphill together – if we do not constantly move forward, we risk sliding backward. It involves developing a culture of preparedness and cooperation across the region, and shifting from a focus on response to one on prevention.

In June this year, the Royal Thai Government hosted the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to consolidate the regional voice for a successor HFA agreement. As countries from around the world prepare to meet in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015, the Asia-Pacific region will bring our essential lessons and experiences to help shape this new global framework.

Shamshad Akhtar is under-secretary-general of UN ESCAP. General Tanasak Patimapragorn is deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs of Thailand. Harsh Vardhan is minister for science and technology of India. Mahinda Amaraweera is minister of disaster management for Sri Lanka. Mohamed Zuhair is minister of state for the National Disaster Management Centre of the Maldives. Syamsul Maarif is minister of the National Agency for Disaster Management of Indonesia.

Workers head to HK despite ban

Agency has been allowed flout government ban on sending domestic workers to Hong Kong with impunity, labour rights group says

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Migrant workers from Indonesia carry placards which collectively read "Slave" next to a portrait resembling a likeness of former Indonesian maid Erwiana Sulistyaningsih during a Labour Day rally in Hong Kong on May 1. Photo: AFP

A LOCAL employment agency is still sending Myanmar women to Hong Kong as domestic workers despite a government ban, labour activists say. Labour Rights Clinic says it has reported the case to the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The government banned agencies from sending Myanmar citizens to Hong Kong as domestic workers in May and Singapore in September, after a series of scandals about the mistreatment of migrant workers engaged in such jobs.

But now two women recruited to go to Hong Kong before the ban came into effect have accused the agency of pressing them to fulfil their contracts though they no longer wish to take up the posts, according to LRC liaison officer U Chit Oo Mg. He named the agency concerned as Gold Mine.

"[Domestic workers] don't want to go any more because they know it's illegal and because they will have to repay the service charges in instalments over a long period," he said.

A Gold Mine spokesperson confirmed to *The Myanmar Times* that the agency had sent some domestic workers to Hong Kong in November. He said that in November 2013 the government had permitted the company to send 200 to Hong Kong but only 150 had been sent to date. The remaining 50 workers will be sent in accordance with the company's permit, which he said remains valid despite the ban.

"We've already got the visas and the workers have completed their training and are asking us every day when they can leave," said the spokesperson. "The training took three months and now they are just waiting at home for the green light to go."

He said the financial consequences for not sending the women could be high: Gold Mine's partner in Hong Kong, Golden Mine, was already facing legal action from some angry employers because workers had not arrived on time.

"The Hong Kong visas are only valid for three months, and if we miss the expiry date we will lose our money," he said.

Myanmar Overseas Employment Agencies Federation general secretary U Kyaw Htin Kyaw said the ministry had shown "mercy" and let Gold Mine continue to send workers according to its November 2013 permit because of the financial problems the company will face if it does not fulfil its contract.

The Ministry of Labour declined to comment when contacted last week. It is unclear how many other agencies received permits to send workers to Hong Kong, but LRC said Gold Mine is the only one still sending them.

> **'[Domestic workers] don't want to go any more because they know it's illegal and they will have to repay the service charges … over a long period.'**
>
> **U Chit Oo Mg**
> Labour Rights Clinic

Myanmar sent its first batch of domestic workers to Hong Kong in February and the 19 young women were to be the first of several hundred to arrive within three months. However, their arrival coincided with protests over the alleged torture of an Indonesian housekeeper by her employer. The scandal made headlines across the globe: The employer was arrested and the maid, Erwiana Sulistyaningsih, was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time* magazine. The case meant the Myanmar group received an unusually high level of media attention and shortly after the first group arrived the ministry abruptly called a halt to the program.

The decision to stop sending workers to Singapore, meanwhile, was equally surprising, as it came while the MOEAF was preparing to sign a memorandum of understanding with its Singaporean counterparts to increase the number of workers going to the city-state from 300 a month to 1000.

MOEAF vice chair U Soe Myint Aung told *The Myanmar Times* at the time that the government was concerned about reports of exploitation. "The ministry wants stricter supervision of agencies employing domestic workers," he said.

U Kyaw Htin Kyaw said he believed domestic workers should be allowed to go to Hong Kong because working conditions were better than in Singapore.

"It's not easy for a local woman to earn K500,000 a month. Hong Kong would be a good place for them," he said.

But Ma Sandar Htwe, who signed a contract with Gold Mine to work in Hong Kong, says she no longer wishes to go.

However, she says Gold Mine has threatened to charge her a penalty of K1.6 million (about US$1660) for breaking the contract if she refuses.

"We've heard bad things about Hong Kong. My mother is worried and doesn't want me to go there anymore. But we can't afford K1.6 million," she said.

A Gold Mine spokesperson said it had not sued any workers but did expect those who completed the training program to still go to Hong Kong. The company has sent notice letters to those who completed the training and later stopped communicating with Gold Mine.

"We are not a charity, but we also didn't treat these poor people unfairly," he said. "If they are not ready to go, we can give them more time. But some of them have just ignored us."

FDA to crack down on pesticide in dried fish

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A woman moves fish drying on racks near Yangon. Photo: Staff

HEALTH authorities have launched a crackdown to keep dangerous pesticides out of the food chain. The chemicals are being used to kill flies and maggots that infest dried fish in the country's delta region, Ayeyarwady Region Food and Drug Administration director U Pyae Sone told *The Myanmar Times* last week.

"Consumers are not aware that pesticides are being used for this purpose," he said.

Under the new Ayeyarwady Region law, illegal use of pesticides on food and beverages can result in a two-year prison sentence and a K200,000 fine.

He added that the FDA had received information concerning the misuse of pesticides on dried fish three months ago from a Ministry of Commerce survey of social media. A subsequent test had discovered hazardous chemicals in the dried fish.

"We discovered this case in the field. This activity takes place in Yangon and Bago regions as well," said U Pyae Sone. Exposure to these chemicals can cause blindness, vomiting, dizziness and shortness of breath, and even cancer, he said.

Yangon, Bago and Ayeyarwady regions and Rakhine and Mon states produce dried, fresh and salt fish. "We will not take action yet, but will offer health education to the owners of dried fish companies, starting on December 22 in Nyaungdon township. We will take action next season to put a stop to this practice," said U Pyae Sone.

Consumer Protection Association chair U Ba Oak Khine said misuse of chemical pesticides also occurred in Rakhine State and Tanintharyi Region. "We have received many complaints from consumers, and worked with the Ministry of Commerce's Consumer Protection Department. We checked samples of dried fish at Yangon's Nandawin Market and discovered tricholoroform pesticide in a dangerous concentration of 0.57 parts per million," said U Ba Oak Khine.

Daw Kyi, the owner of a dried fish company in Maubin township, admitted using chemicals to kill flies and maggots when drying fish but said she did not know it was harmful to people.

"We bought the chemicals from the wholesaler, who told me there were no side effects," she said.

Madaya residents demand mine closure

RESIDENTS of Pat Lae Inn village tract in Mandalay Region's Madaya township have demanded a local alabaster mining operation be halted because they say it is destroying crops and is too close to a monastery.

Khine Mar Toe Company started mining alabaster in August in the Yatkansintaung area of Madaya township, residents told *The Myanmar Times* on December 20. They have sent complaints to the President's Office and the Ministry of Mines asking the authorities to close it down.

More than 300 farmers from Shwe Gone Tine, Nyaung Pin, Shwe Done, Ngat Sar and Kyaut Padamyar villages in Yatkansintaung area staged a protest outside the company's office on December 20 asking it to permanently stop its mining operations.

"Heavy machinery at the site is making noises and creating vibrations all day and night," said U Myo Swe, a villager from Shwe Gone Tine village.

"The hillsides they are dynamiting to mine alabaster are alongside monsoon paddy land."

Residents said they have heard the mine has closed but have received no official confirmation.

"We don't have any intention to hurt the company," said Yakansintaung Sayadaw U Wimala. "But residents are now facing difficulties because they have to rely on those forests and hillsides. When we met with U Aung Chan Thar, who is the mine owner's brother, on December 15, he told us they are working with approval from the chief minister of Mandalay Region. He added that the chief minister, U Ye Myint, had recently told the company to stop mining." – *Kyaw Ko Ko, translation by Zar Zar Soe*

IN PICTURES

PHOTO: AFP

President U Thein Sein speaks during the opening ceremony of the 5th Summit of the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program in Bangkok on December 20.

Military suggests forming press club

Vetted reporters could attend regularly meetings – even dinner parties – with officers

YEE MON LUN MIN MANG

DINNER with the generals – that's how reporters could soon be getting their scoops from the military, if a proposal from a senior Tatmadaw officer is put into action.

Lieutenant Colonel Myat Min Oo made the suggestion at a workshop between military officials, the Myanmar Press Council (Interim) and journalists in Yangon on December 20, at which participants shared ideas on improving information flow between the military and media.

Lt Col Myat Min Oo suggested the formation of a military press club of reporters who would be vetted by the press council before being admitted.

"If information is needed from the military, then it would be provided to members of the club. Meetings could be held weekly or monthly," he said.

"In other countries, they usually do dinner parties … They share information at the dinner party. The reporters raise their questions and the responsible officials reply to it. Press conferences are conducted in this way."

Another military representative said that many Tatmadaw officials still have concerns about dealing with the media.

"To be honest, civil servants like us are afraid of the media. Why? Some newspapers and journals are writing quotes as if they have obtained them from us [when they did not]. The impact is not good for us," he said.

Another officer conceded that the military was not as nimble in dealing with private media as ethnic armed groups but said it was more difficult for the Tatmadaw to confirm information.

'To be honest, civil servants like us are afraid of the media.'

Military representative

In the case of the death of freelance journalist Ko Par Gyi, the Tatmadaw only confirmed the news to press council on October 23, 19 days after his death in military custody.

"Some ethnic armed groups [release information] as soon as they hear gunfire," he said.

"Since their forces only have about 100 or 200 soldiers. They do not have any problem releasing information. They can also confirm it quickly.

"But for us, as we are highly institutionalised, we need to be very sure that the news is accurate."

The workshop – the first such discussions between the military and journalists – followed a meeting between Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and the press council in November.

Press council member U Thiha Saw, who is also an editorial director at *The Myanmar Times*, said the workshop had helped build understanding between both sides. He said it was positive that the military had promised to provide contact email addresses and phone numbers to reporters once the plan had been approved by senior officials.

Reporters and some members of the press council asked for another workshop to be held in January to discuss the information dissemination proposals in more detail. Military officials responded that they would submit the proposal to their superiors.

Another issue discussed on December 20 was the military's earlier proposal that journalists obtain information through the army-run *Myawaddy* news portal.

Reporters responded that *Myawaddy* was a news agency and the Ministry of Defence should release information through a separate channel.

Breeding program needed to save Irrawaddy dolphin: expert

KHIN SU WAI

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Department of Fisheries staff inspect an Irrawaddy dolphin found near Myit Kan Gyi village in Singgu township on December 4. Photo: Supplied

THE critically endangered Irrawaddy dolphin needs a safe place to breed if it is to stave off the extinction, an adviser to the Myanmar Fisheries Federation said.

U Swe Thwin said breeding research zones should be established near Shein-Ma-Mar and the Mingun area close to Mandalay, and near Bhamo University in southern Kachin State.

He said Myanmar should study how other countries have had success with breeding programs for endangered animals.

"China was able to successfully breed their pandas by conducting a lot of research on their breeding patterns," he said. "This has stopped them from becoming extinct, even though it is very difficult to breed pandas.

"We face the same issue – even if we put two dolphins together there's no guarantee they will breed, and dolphins are more intelligent than pandas."

U Swe Thwin made the comments after the bodies of three dolphins were found during December alone, including two discovered on December 4 in a 74-kilometre (46-mile) protected zone between Mingun and Kyaukmyaung on the Ayeyarwady River.

The first dolphin found dead was in Myint Kan Gyi village in Singgu township and was a female about one year old. The cause of death was determined to be battery fishing. The second dolphin was found in the Mingun area, with a 30-centimetre cut to its abdomen; the cause of the wound could not be determined. The third dolphin was found in Sagaing Region with a missing tail.

The deaths mean the estimated population in the protected zone is just 22. In August, dolphin specialist U Han Win told *The Myanmar Times* that only 63 dolphins were thought to survive in the wild along a 370km stretch of the Ayeyarwady, down from 72 in 2005.

U Mg Mg Oo, a spokesperson for environmental advocacy group Sein Yaung So, said battery fishing is a major threat to the dolphins but there are plenty of other dangers. He said juvenile dolphins often did not know how to avoid the dangers they face.

"Our education on conserving dolphins in the protected area is repeated over and over again – people need to follow our advice and conserve this rare animal," said U Zaw Mann, an officer from the Department of Fisheries.

U Swe Thwin said the Department of Fisheries and the Forestry Department had a responsibility to protect the remaining dolphins from fishermen. While the Wildlife Conservation Society and Department of Fisheries conduct patrols, these only take place on a handful of days each month.

He added that the true cost of the extinction of the Irrawaddy Dolphin, which is famous for the cooperative fishing technique it employs with local fishermen to help increase their catch, would only be realised when they were gone.

"This is a national icon for Myanmar and we need to protect it," he said.

Great Wall rents land to produce hybrid

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AGRICULTURE firm Great Wall is renting about 440 acres of farmland in Nay Pyi Taw to grow a hybrid rice crop, farmers and officials said last week.

The company is renting the land from farmers in Alyinlo village tract for K250,000 an acre, said farmer Ko Myo Linn Aung.

"The company is renting our land for K250,000 an acre to produce hybrid paddy," he said. "They offered K200,000 before but we did not agree until they raised the price."

An official at the Pyinmana branch of the Department of Agriculture, under the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, confirmed the agreement, which will see the summer paddy grown and harvested with the aid of machinery.

"This is a deal between the farmers and the company," deputy head of the department, U Kyaw Zaw, said on December 22.

U Kyaw Zaw also confirmed the rental price.

He added that the soil in Nay Pyi Taw is fertile and yields an average of 100 baskets of paddy an acre, worth about K400,000. – *Translation by Thiri Min Htun*

Doctor cleared of malpractice charge

Mother of child who died after being delivered two months premature says she will appeal Supreme Court ruling that doctor was not neglient

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A MOTHER whose baby died after being delivered two months premature by a doctor in North Okkalapa township will appeal a Union Supreme Court ruling that the doctor was not at fault, she told media last week.

Last month, the Supreme Court dismissed Daw Thae Phyu Phyu Aung's case against obstetrician and gynecologist Dr Mee Mee Thein, saying there was insufficient proof of medical wrongdoing in the July 8, 2010, death of the eight-day-old child.

But Daw Thae Phyu Phyu Aung and her lawyer Daw Ni Ni Lwin have criticised the verdict and announced they will apply for a revision.

"I think the decision is not fair," Daw Thae Phyu Phyu Aung said at a press conference last week.

Doctor and patient have differing accounts of events leading up to the infant's death.

"I had regular check-ups with Dr Mee Mee Thein at the Jivitadana Sangha Hospital," Daw Thae Phyu Phyu Aung said. "She said I have to give birth to my baby now because the due date had arrived. I asked to move the delivery date to the next week because I was not ready to give birth then. She gave me some medicine and then referred me to the North Okkalapa private clinic at Shwelamin Hospital to deliver my baby."

The baby was delivered by caesarian section, weighing 3 pounds 5 ounces. It was transferred to North Okkalapa Hospital for treatment but died eight days later of infection.

"The child specialists at North Okkalapa Hospital said when they checked my medical record my due date was not on time and I needed another two months before I could give birth to the baby," Daw Thae Phyu Phyu Aung said.

However, Dr Mee Mee Thein told *The Myanmar Times* that while the due date had not arrived, the patient was in pain when she came to see her. She said she administered medicine to facilitate a caesarian delivery because the parents led her to believe they wanted to give birth soon.

'She said I had to give birth to my baby now because the due date had arrived.'

Daw Thae Phyu Phyu Aung
Mother of deceased child

The Supreme Court's decision follows two opposing decisions at the township and district levels.

On August 7, 2013, North Okkalapa Court delivered a guilty verdict of death by negligence under section 304(a) of the Penal Code.

However, on September 17, 2013, the Eastern District Court dismissed the charge, ruling that the cause of death was not premature birth but neonatal sepsis, a blood infection which can occur in infants under 90 days.

Following the original complaint, the Myanmar Medical Council (MMC) decided to strip Dr Mee Mee Thein of her licence to practice for a period of five years, it said on June 1, 2012.

The MMC listed miscalculation of the due date, an erroneous decision to deliver through ceasarean, failure to provide proper consultation to the parents and poor communication as the reasons for the decision.

Following multiple appeals by Dr Mee Mee Thein, however, the MMC reinstated her licence earlier this year, two years and three months into the planned five-year ban.

Dr Mee Mee Thein speaks at a press event in September 2013. Photo: Zarni Phyo

Daw Thae Phyu Phyu Aung said she could not understand why the MMC licence was renewed when a case was ongoing, and that she intended to question the council directly about the decision.

The MMC did not respond to requests for comment by *The Myanmar Times* before press time.

Govt to conduct census of migrant workers

IN a bid to offer better protection to its citizens working abroad, the government is to carry out a census of all Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand by the end of March 2015, the deputy labour minister has announced.

Speaking at Myanmar International Convention Centre, U Htin Aung said the census would cover both documented and illegal migrant workers in Thailand. "We will do this as quickly as possible by drawing up plans and forming committees systematically," he said.

U Htin Aung said the ministry planned to count Myanmar workers in Malaysia as well, as a prelude to regularising the position of illegal workers there. Malaysia's labour ministry is reportedly planning to take legal action against illegal workers there from the end of this month.

"We take the affairs of our people seriously," said the deputy minister.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security believes there are about 1.7 million migrants working in Thailand, the majority illegally. The number of migrant in Malaysia is thought to be in the hundreds of thousands.

Department of Labour director general U Myo Aung said ministry staff would visit worksites to collect information from workers who have not formally registered their presence in Thailand.

"Our staff will go to factories and workshops to find those who didn't come to Myanmar labour offices in Thailand during the registration periods," he said. "If they are real Myanmar citizens then they will be entitled to rights under Thailand's labour laws." – *Pyae Thet Phyo*

Views

Regional govt happy to keep the bribes flowing

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ON December 12, Yangon Region Hluttaw representative U Thaung Kyaw submitted a proposal to "make a law and allow massage parlours in Yangon Region to operate according to a legal framework". The proposal was defeated, but it's worth looking more closely at the points made by U Thaung Kyaw and Daw Nyo Nyo Thin, who seconded the proposal, and those who argued against it.

U Thaung Kyaw began, "In [Myanmar], both massage parlours and those who go to have a massage at these places are considered lawbreakers, because massage parlours have to operate illegally.

"However, they were ignored by authorities so it became widespread for them to operate despite being in breach of the law."

The point of his proposal is that young women working in such places lack any legal protection and can being abused by their male customers.

Prominent MP Daw Nyo Nyo Thin and some other opposition MPs seconded the proposal.

Minister for Border Affairs and Security Colonel Tin Win responded on behalf of the regional government.

He said that massage parlours are "not appropriate in Myanmar culture so cannot be allowed officially". He then said, however, that if they were to be regulated it would be the responsibility of the Union rather than regional government to enact such a law.

The motion was then defeated and recorded in the parliament.

The minister said massage businesses are not appropriate in Myanmar culture. But there are a range of massages available, including the spa and massage services offered by some luxury hotels, blind massage therapists and the illegal massage parlours that MPs were discussing.

There are also traditional masseurs who operate in villages and wards across the country. It is obvious that this kind of massage is already a part of Myanmar culture, and the spa and massage parlours that proliferate today are based on this tradition. It is not sensible to say that massage is inappropriate in Myanmar culture.

The next thing Col Tin Win said was that if massage businesses were to be permitted to operate in Yangon, they should be allowed to operate nationally under a single law. This is simply an attempt to evade responsibility. The constitution allows region or state parliaments to enact laws on matters prescribed in schedule 2 of the region or state hluttaw legislative list.

There are so many massage parlours in Yangon. Despite calling themselves massage parlours, everyone knows they are places where men go to pay for sexual services.

Nearly all of these massage parlours are illegal so owners have to pay bribes to the authorities to run their businesses. The massage industry in Myanmar is a giant illegal business that exploits many young women, and they are being exploited by both business owners and the authorities.

Young girls working in massage parlours have no legal protection. The authorities need to consider either cracking down on these businesses to get rid of them entirely or legalising them according to cultural norms and international standards. They have to make a choice.

Many young women ... are being exploited by both massage parlour owners and the authorities.

The police and authorities at all levels have never chosen the first option. The authorities regularly carry out raids on illegal massage parlours but the businesses soon reopen if the owner pays bribes to those who conducted the raids. It's impossible to say how much black money the authorities and their associates have gained from massage parlours but it's clear they don't want to give up this lucrative income stream by legalising the sector.

The best way to deal with this issue is to create a legal framework for massage parlours as some MPs have proposed. In neighbouring countries, such as Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, their governments have created good conditions for massage firms to run openly and legally and therefore young girls in those countries can earn good income in fair conditions.

However, the decision made by regional government and the regional hluttaw shows that the government is all too happy to keep the black money flowing into officials' pockets. To them, that is obviously more important than the many young Myanmar women who are being mistreated in this illegal industry. – *Translation by Zar Zar Soe*

A mes

Hun Sen's Machiavellian man

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TEN days ago, Sam Rainsy, Cambodia's veteran opposition leader and the region's nearest equivalent to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, managed once again to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

It was a performance that crystallised how tough it is for oppositionists to challenge entrenched authoritarian regimes and it provided a salient lesson that Daw Suu's National League for Democracy must heed.

Rainsy had announced, in his usual effusive style, that he had persuaded Cambodia's long-ruling leader, Prime Minister Hun Sen, to allow him to become the official minority leader in parliament.

Is that a big deal, you may wonder? No, it isn't, but it did allow Rainsy's supporters to do some crowing and his sympathisers in the anti-Hun Sen media to put his name in the headlines again.

However, Rainsy's claim that in a parliamentary context the accord has put him on a par with the PM is absurd.

The fact is he has been suckered again by the wily premier, who, as Orson Welles once said of Macbeth, might aptly be called "a gangster with a conscience".

Hun Sen is a consummate Machiavellian, who believes that it's better to be feared than loved.

Rainsy believes the reverse – unless you are from Vietnam. Unlike Daw Suu's attitude to anti-Muslim sentiment, Rainsy openly and very vocally endorses anti-Vietnamese bigotry.

It is a stance that won him support among the masses in last year's general election, but it has also led to the reduced regard many now have for him.

And that too is a curious echo of the way many in the West, who were unequivocal supporters of Daw Suu, are now becoming rather jaundiced about her and about what may happen after next year's election.

In that regard, it bears recalling that many felt Hun Sen had miscalculated when, just before last year's Cambodian election, he asked King Norodom Sihamoni to grant a pardon to Rainsy, who had fled to Paris to avoid arrest.

Upon his return, Rainsy employed his trademark anti-Vietnam vitriol and helped his Cambodia National Rescue Party to win 55 seats out of 123.

That drastically reduced the majority for Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party to just 13 seats and should have laid the groundwork for victory at the next election.

But in typically stubborn style, Rainsy did not lead his men into parliament and perform as an effective opposition, thereby showing it was a coherent, responsible party capable of governing in its own right.

No, he boycotted parliament

Views

sage from Cambodia

euverings have snookered Sam Rainsy – and offer lessons for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) leader Sam Rainsy speaks during a rally to mark Human Rights day in Phnom Penh on December 10. Photo: AFP

and led his people onto the streets alleging that electoral fraud had deprived them of victory. He wanted Hun Sen out now.

It was very unwise, rather like the NLD's boycott of the 2010 election here.

The wily Hun Sen shrugged and allowed the protests to continue for a while. Then, when they grew and became more rambunctious, he sent in his security men and they cracked heads and made arrests.

Finally Rainsy got the point and was obliged to cut a deal with Hun Sen.

Both sides made concessions, but really the terms were set by the PM. While he did not gloat when Rainsy's men finally trooped into parliament, he did initially decline to regard them as a formal opposition.

Earlier this month, he conceded that tidbit to Rainsy, who then boasted that the move was "a vital political turn" which recognised his party for "its role, duty and rights in order to allow it to completely fulfil its job".

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is neither as feckless nor as volatile as Rainsy and thus is less likely to fall into the same trap as he did.

Actually, instead of victory it was a defeat, a humiliation.

As Ou Virak, president of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, said, "Making Rainsy's post nominally equal in rank to the prime minister but with no real power is a tactic used successfully by Hun Sen many times before."

Not only that, but while stringing Rainsy along, Hun Sen continued to preside over an economic boom and drew praise for his country's open market, vibrant civil society and arguably the freest press in the region.

The streets are also safe – the average Cambodian runs less risk of being attacked or shot than does the average Thai or Filipino, let alone the average American.

It all sends a very valuable message to the government's opponents in the run-up to Myanmar's general election next year.

Of course, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is neither as feckless nor as volatile as Rainsy and thus is less likely to fall into the same trap as he did in Cambodia.

Yet there are disturbing signs: her Buddhist-Bamar nationalism has ominous echoes of Rainsy's anti-Vietnamese xenophobia.

And there were those earlier rumours that the NLD might boycott the coming election if its demands for constitutional reform were not met.

That would not only be stupid, but – like Rainsy's parliamentary boycott in Phnom Penh – would likely end in abject failure that would stain the party's image and leave people wondering about its capacity to govern.

Aside from the 25 percent of seats assigned to the military, the NLD should win a majority of the remaining seats, although it may fail in constituencies where ethnic minorities and Muslims predominate.

If that happens, it should not follow Rainsy's handbook and take to the streets. That would be folly.

It would not only lead to NLD members being detained en masse once again, but also to the party splitting or even being dissolved.

And that in turn would lead to the military controlling the polity for even longer than any of us wants.

The Mail Box

Dear Editor,

I am writing to you in regard to your recent article titled "What we have to eat" published in the December 8 issue. While reading the article we came across several inconsistencies pertaining to World Food Programme activities in Myanmar. I must admit I was saddened by the way our work was depicted.

In Kachin, your article mentions that WFP used to provide each person with a monthly ration of 6 kilograms of rice, a bottle of oil, a pack of salt and 2kg of beans. That stopped in December 2013. The elderly and children under one year of age used to receive nutrient powder but "that has stopped as well". Your article also quotes camp management committee member Daw Htu Nan says, "In the first years, the World Food Programme provided oil in tins and it was frozen."

In Kachin, since September 2011 WFP and its partners provide all displaced beneficiaries in the areas we can reach with 13.5kg of rice, 1.8kg of chickpeas, 0.9 litres of fortified oil and 150 grams of salt a month. Children under two and pregnant and nursing mothers receive in addition fortified blended food to cover their specific needs.

We do not distribute frozen oil. Below or above a certain temperature oil can crystalise (it does not technically freeze, except if subject to extremely cold temperatures). That happens everywhere in the world. It does not impact the quality of the oil in terms of flavor and nutritional value. The crystals in the oil disappear during cooking.

Please note as well that displaced persons from Kachin settled in northern Shan are also assisted by the WFP, where they receive a food basket or a combination of cash and food in some areas in order to diversify their diet.

Further, the article mentions about assistance to displaced populations in Rakhine: "The WFP provides – rice, oil, salt – but the rations are not enough for the daily meal". The WFP food basket is the same for all IDPs in Myanmar, be it in Rakhine or Kachin. In Rakhine, children and pregnant/nursing mothers also receive fortified blended food to cover their specific needs.

These quantities are for one person. They are calculated – based on an internationally recognised standard – to cover the energy needs of one active adult.

Yours sincerely,

Guillaume Foliot

Deputy country director, World Food Programme

Business

Partners for Yangon Stock Exchange sign a deal to set up

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TWO Japanese firms and Myanma Economic Bank on December 23 signed an agreement to establish the Yangon Stock Exchange (YSX), which is targeted to be opened late 2015.

The agreement, between Daiwa Institute of Research, an arm of Daiwa Securities Group, as well as Japan Exchange Group and state-owned Myanma Economic Bank, is the result of discussions that have been ongoing since May 29, 2012, when a memorandum of understanding was initially signed.

The partners will now set up a joint-venture firm called Yangon Stock Exchange-Joint Venture Limited with K32 billion capital (US$31 million). There will five total directors, with three Myanmar directors and one from each of the two Japanese firms – though officials declined to comment on respective ownership stakes.

"The agreement is the outcome of long and conscientious negotiations between the competent authorities of Japan and Myanmar to set up and operate the first stock exchange in Myanmar," a press release said.

The government's self-imposed 2015 deadline to open the stock exchange has come under the microscope, with some claiming it will be difficult to meet.

Asked whether the exchange is on track, Daiwa said in a statement: "Although enactment of related laws and rules takes more time than we expected, Myanmar government seems to be eager to open stock exchange in 2015. [Daiwa Institute of Research] would like to support them with utmost effort with Japanese Government and [Japan Exchange Group]."

2015

Myanmar government's self-imposed deadline to open the planned Yangon Stock Exchange

Daiwa, which is one of the largest and oldest Japanese securities companies, has also established some of the information technology infrastructure required for a modern stock exchange in offices located at MICT Park in Hlaing township.

Myanmar government officials have said the YSX will be run out of the former headquarters of Myawaddy Bank near Sule Pagoda. Daiwa said the location of the stock exhange will be revealed after a formal decision is made.

The rules and regulations governing the exchange are still to be released, and a Securities and Exchange Commission is still to be formed.

From a technical point of view, the YSX and securities companies will need to be equipped with mutually connected computer systems. "[Daiwa Institute of Research] has already started to develop the computer system for YSX," Daiwa said in a statement to *The Myanmar Times*.

Daiwa is also a partner in the Myanmar Securities Exchange Center, an over-the-counter market on the second floor of Myanma Economic bank near Sule Pagoda. Founded in 1996, it has two companies listed on the exchange, both of which are seldom traded.

The exchange center will continue to operate in the future, and is currently in the business of matching stock orders. In the future, the YSX will be an organisation where investors' orders are gathered together and securities trading is executed in an organised fashion, Daiwa's statement said.

The other Japanese partner in the YSX is Japan Exchange Group, the operator of the Tokyo Stock Exchange along with a smaller market in Osaka.

Imported cars roll off a ship docked in Yangon. Photo: Staff

Room to park requir

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THERE are a lot more cars piling into Yangon than ever before, and less room to park them.

In a bid to cut down on the chaos, individual importers will be required to prove they have a parking space for the vehicle beginning on January 1 – though some question whether the policy will work in practice.

The Supervisory Committee for Car Imports at the Ministry of Commerce announced the new rules on December 18, adding all citizens of Yangon Region aiming to import cars will need a recommendation letter from a township officer pledging the would-be importer has access to a parking space.

The rule change has provoked criticism, particularly that it opens the door for payments in return for the required paperwork, while others say it is too early yet to determine whether it will be effective.

The move comes out of public workshops held in November and December aimed at solving the problems of too many Yangon traffic jams. A number of ideas were floated at the workshops, aiming to speed up traffic while still allowing vehicle imports.

A 2012 move to allow each citizen to import one vehicle over their lifetime is partly responsible

KBZ the largest taxpayer last year as other large firms trade places

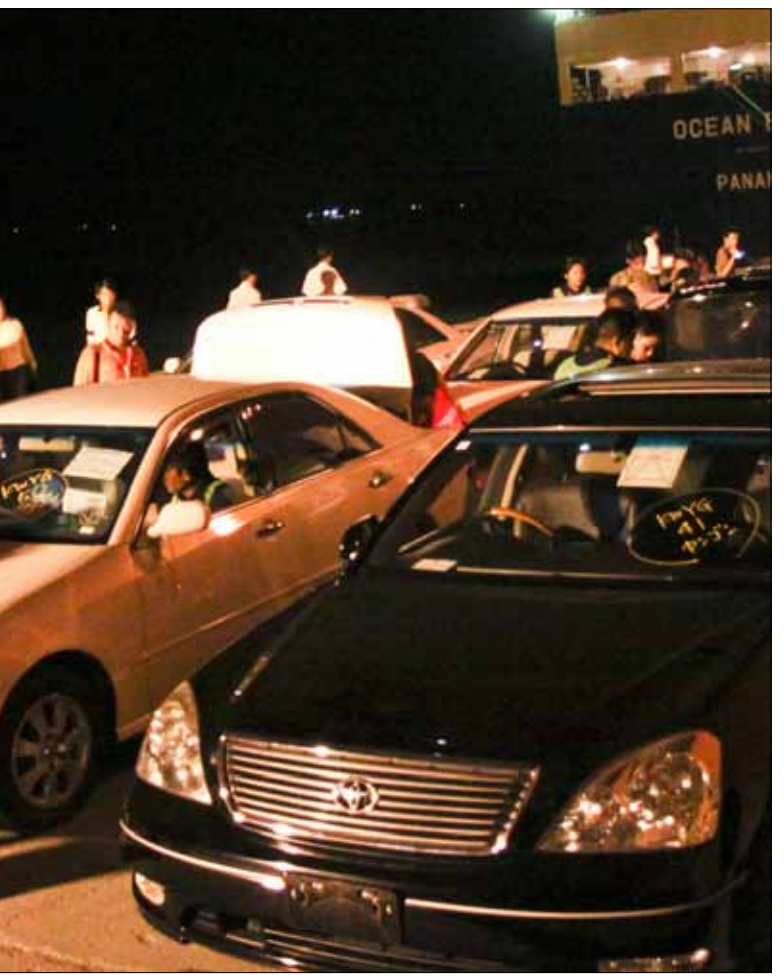
BUSINESS 25

Property traders wish for a more active market in 2015

PROPERTY 28

Exchange Rates (December 26 close)

Currency	Buying	Selling
Euro	K1254	K1267
Malaysia Ringitt	K305	K307
Singapore Dollar	K781	K788
Thai Baht	K31	K32
US Dollar	K1037	K1041



ed for car imports

for a surge of cars on Yangon's roads. Some people also sell their right to import vehicles to large-scale importers.

Without the parking garages and lots needed to accommodate this influx, cars often end up parked on the road. This narrows the amount of road open to traffic, slowing down its flow on city streets.

Frequent traffic jams are generating discussion over the possibility of changing import policies – though senior Ministry of Commerce officials have pledged the policies will not change.

Others are looking for novel ways to each congestion, but some, such as U Aung Than Win, chair of the Myanmar Automobile Trade Association, say the new policy of requiring importers to show evidence of a reserved parking space may not be effective.

"I don't think this new policy is completely correct," he said. "We will need to wait and see."

The association had advised to restrict imports to only one person per household instead of every member in a household, which would slow imports.

The required forms will be available at township offices, U Aung Than Win said

"One important thing is [township] administrators should be honest and correct because Myanmar has corrupt systems everywhere," he said.

U Aung Than Win added he is worried whether the system will be an effective check.

U Soe Htun, chair of the Myanmar Automobile Manufacturers and Distribution Association, said some businesspeople own lots in suburban areas like North Dagon to hold cars.

The system of township administrators recommending whether the car importer has a parking space may be difficult to implement in practice, as it is often hard to find a permanent parking space.

"The policy includes all car sales centres and all personal importers, but we can't say how effective the policy will be just yet – we will first need to wait four or five months before we can see," said U Soe Htun.

Former CEO questions future as Air Mandalay service is grounded

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THE recently departed chief executive officer of Air Mandalay says there is "zero chance" the struggling domestic airline can return to the skies at the end of January as its management has claimed, and even cast doubt on the future of the company.

However, new CEO U Sai Kham Park Hpa insisted last week that the company was not in danger of ceasing operations permanently and would have three aircraft operating by February.

"Air Mandalay's suspension of operations is not related to our financial position. All of our crews are working except for pilots and air stewards," he said.

"We will resume operations with one ATR 72-212 and two [Embraer] ERJ 145 aircraft, which will arrive in Myanmar near the end of January 2015. So we will be officially flying again no later than February."

Air Mandalay announced earlier this month that it was halting flights from December 10 through to at least the end of January, after a planned aircraft leasing deal for two ERJ 145s fell through "due to unforeseen circumstances". According to flight schedules released by the airline last month, the aircraft were due to come into service on November 17.

U Sai Kham Park Hpa said the planes had failed to arrive because the taxes levied by the government were prohibitively high. Air Mandalay is negotiating to "adjust" the import taxes on the aircraft, he said.

"We won't be able to compete if the taxes are too high because we will have to set our ticket prices higher than other airlines," he said.

However, former CEO Gary Villiard, who resigned on November 14 due to conflict with the airline's shareholders, said he did not believe it would be possible for the airline to resume services at the end of January.

He said it was the third aircraft leasing deal to fall through in the past year and questioned whether Air Mandalay had the financing and corporate affairs skills needed to turn the airline around.

Negotiations with a potential new investor had recently broken down, he said, while Air Mandalay is also engaged in a dispute with the Ministry of Transport over the sale of the government's one-third stake in the carrier.

"I drew on every connection I had to save the airline," said Mr Villiard. "At every board meeting shareholders promised to make financial commitments but those commitments were never kept.

"It's a crying shame because the Air Mandalay brand is so powerful. I couldn't believe when I got here how strong the brand is. But to underfund it or refuse to take on equity partners ... is going to leave 386 people on the street with no place to go."

The company also has a "considerable list" of vendors who are yet to be paid, including some who have been waiting more than 18 months, Mr Villiard said.

He said refusal of the shareholders to pay these vendors was a major factor in his resignation.

"I've spend 40 years maintaining my integrity and I was unwilling to let Air Mandalay sacrifice it."

Mr Villiard confirmed the details of complaints from several vendors with which *The Myanmar Times* has been in contact with. In one case, an IT management company had done "considerable work" for Air Mandalay fixing its online booking system, he said – including visiting the company four times at its own expense – but was never paid because Air Mandalay's shareholders objected to paying a US$2000 administration fee.

The suspension has caused few disruptions for the travel industry, agents said, as Air Mandalay has been operating on a reduced schedule for months due to most of its ageing fleet being out of service.

In 2010, the airline was also forced to stop flying for several months because of maintenance problems with its aircraft, which include two ATR 72s and an ATR 42.

Two of these – one ATR 72 and the ATR 42 – can no longer be operated in Myanmar because the Department of Civil Aviation Law prohibits the use of aircraft that are more than 25 years old.

Nice Fare ticketing agency supervisor Ko Chu Maung Maung said his company had been refunding money to those who had purchased tickets or placing them on other carriers.

"Passengers accepted these choices so we have not had many problems," he said.

Myanmar Voyages managing director U Thet Lwin Toh said his company rarely used Air Mandalay but he expected the airline to make a return next year.

"They signed a deal this year to replace their planes with Boeing aircraft in 2015 so I think they suspended because they are training their crews," he said.

It comes just a month after Air Mandalay inked a memorandum of collaboration with Boeing that would see the two companies cooperate on procuring Boeing 737 airplanes through leasing channels to support Air Mandalay's expansion.

Boeing refused to discuss the deal last week, with a spokesperson saying its "official response is that we do not comment about our customer activities".

But U Sai Kham Park Hpa said the deal was related to a planned international expansion and was not linked to securing aircraft for domestic routes.

Earlier this year Air Mandalay said it had placed an order with Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation for six MRJ90 aircraft, becoming the first Asian carrier outside to Japan to order the jet, which is being jointly developed with Toyota.

The deal, which also gave Air Mandalay a purchase option for an additional four MRJ90, was signed on the sidelines of the Farnborough Airshow in Britain in July.

The planes, which are expected to have a capacity of 86 to 96 seats, are scheduled for delivery in the second quarter of 2018.

Air Mandalay was launched in 1994 as Myanmar's first privately owned domestic carrier. According to its website, the current shareholders are Air Mandalay Holdings Pte Ltd of Singapore, Premier Airlines Pte Ltd of Malaysia and state-run Myanma Airways, which recently rebranded as Myanmar National Airlines.

Battle over banking draft law set to continue

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DEBATE is heating up on the draft Banks and Financial Institutions Law, which is set to significantly change the rules under which the banking sector operates.

Proponents of the new law say it will assist the sector with modernising and is more comprehensive than existing rules, while opponents say it gives too much power to the Central Bank of Myanmar and is removed from the realities of banking in the country.

Among the more significant provisions are those strengthening the oversight of the Central Bank and requirements in areas like lending to related parties, money laundering and measures ensuring liquidity and solvency. The draft law, which received input from international organisations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, also includes areas like mobile and e-banking that were not in the previous 1990 law.

Indeed, the new draft itself is more than twice the length of the previous law.

"We can see straight away the areas that will raise the hackles of some of the existing local banks, but for the sake of the sector these concerns should be sidelined," said Sean Turnell, a Myanmar-focused economist at Australia's Macquarie University.

The draft was publically released in November and, as *The Myanmar Times* previously reported, has drawn criticism from groups such as parliament's Banks and Monetary Affairs Development Committee.

Committee secretary U Win Myint said previously the law is long and complicated and "can be criticised on every page".

"We've found the Central Bank has taken the safe side too much, and is too influential" in the current draft, he said.

The law was first discussed in parliament in November, though a vote is not expected until later in the new year. Among some parliamentarians and bankers, there is opposition to passing it in its current form.

U Win Myint said the parliamentary committee – which is chaired by U Aung Thaung, a politician who was recently blacklisted by the United States over claims he is working against the ongoing government reform efforts – is open to collecting opinions from the public, aiming to propose alternatives to the current draft.

Others disagree on the value of the new law. Mr Turnell said it is necessary to assist with building a "strong and trusted banking sector" in the country.

The draft requires all existing banks to be authorised under the new law, meaning all senior executives, owners and board members must meet various "fit and proper person" tests. It has requirements for capital adequacy, liquidity, large exposure limits and other measures that are in keeping with international best practices, but also adapted to the particular circumstances and difficulties in Myanmar, he said.

Mr Turnell also highlighted provisions on lending to related parties, sections on money laundering and unwinding failed banks as steps forward for the industry.

The new law "reflects greatest 21st century financial complexity, much greater governance requirements globally, and general thoroughness," he said.

The World Bank, which provided input for the draft law, says it is an important step for the banking sector.

"The current [1990] Financial Institutions Law suffers from serious gaps in both the structure and contents required for it to be implemented consistently, transparently, and effectively," it said in a statement to *The Myanmar Times*. "The 1998 Asian crisis and recent global crisis have highlighted several lessons, the foremost being the importance of a sound legal and regulatory framework for the supervision of banks, consolidated supervision, crisis management, provisions to prevent cross-border insolvency, and consumer protection."

Some local bankers support the new law, saying it will assist the professional development of the sector.

"The proposed law is in line with international standards of good governance and how to professionally manage a bank and banking system," said Joe Barker-Bennett, a consultant at Tun Foundation Bank, which shares ownership with *The Myanmar Times*.

"There are no surprises or anything unusual in it and it will need the Central Bank to follow up to ensure banks implement and adhere to the law. Banking is about to become a lot more complex and banks need to be deregulated to compete with foreign banks and provide customers with the services they need to support their businesses," he said.

"After years of being wrapped in cotton wool by the Central Bank, this provides a good guide as to how banks need to manage themselves in the new reality."

Mr Barker-Bennett said one concern is the timescale, as to how quickly this law will be passed and then when the Central Bank deregulates the local banks.

"It was always understood during the issuing of licences to foreign banks that local banks would be able to compete on a level playing field with foreign banks and do everything they can do," he said.

However, with talk of the first foreign banks starting to operate as early as March 2015, they would likely be entering before the draft is implemented.

"This means foreign banks will be able to offer low interest US dollar loans, without security, to their foreign clients, before local banks can do the same. This will disadvantage both local firms competing for business and local banks, in a country where many invoices are in US dollars – removing currency risk. We need some clarity on this and local banks should be able to do everything foreign banks can do at the same time, at the very least."

David O'Callaghan, a consultant at Tun Foundation, said there is a learning process for all parties, including the banks and the regulator, as the country opens up.

"It's like moving from a 1950s car with four pistons to a modern BMW," he said.

Seeking to avoid an unpleasant bus trip

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A shared taxi (right) and an unofficial minibus (left) wait for potential passengers. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

LARGE buses are common sights as they race for passengers through a cloud of exhaust fumes on Yangon's streets, jockeying for position while rumbling down the city's main arteries.

They generally follow prescribed routes and offer limited options to some commuters, who can be forced to change buses three or four times in some cases.

The buses are also often uncomfortable to ride on. But they draw passengers based on low prices – fares of about K200 certainly beat out taxi prices, which are usually several times more expensive.

Ma Aye Aye uses buses to get to work daily, arriving exhausted before the workday has even begun. "It's tough to take public transit," she said. "It takes a long time, and it's very crowded and I'm very tired."

Private taxis are out of her price range, and she's been stuck finding an alternative – until recently. Entrepreneurs have increasingly set up alternatives, which are now ferrying passengers on a regular, but often unofficial, basis. Some taxi drivers are operating under a shared system, where four or five passengers pay K1000 each to complete the journey from Sule Pagoda to North Okkalapa township. Other entrepreneurs are running unofficial minibuses, which cram in more passengers for the ride but charge less than a shared taxi – K500 for each of the 15 or so passengers for the Sule Pagoda to North Okkalapa run in a minibus, for instance.

The unofficial minibus lines compete with shared taxis. Often the vehicles used for shared taxis and minibuses look the same, the difference being that taxis are registered and have a "taxi" sign on the roof, while the minibuses do not.

Frequent commuter Ma Zin Mar Htwe said the hour-and-a-half journey on a large bus often resulted in her still without a seat at the trip's end, whereas taking a shared taxi cuts the trip down to a much more pleasant 45 minutesi.

"The bus is crowded with people, and I have to alight at two bus stops, so there's an additional cost and no certainty I'll have a seat," she said. "So I choose the comfortable way."

These minibuses and shared taxis do not keep regular schedules. Driver Ko Wai Lin, who plies a route from downtown to Yuzana township each day with his minibus, said he chooses his hours based on anticipated number of customers, rather than bus lines that simply complete circuits all day.

Ko Wai Lin says he usually travels his route about six times a day, though in the worst traffic this can be impossible. Though he has been in business for seven years, he has been increasing competition over the last six months. He has also expanded his business, and now owns 15 minibuses which he then rents out to other drivers. The drivers bid for the right to drive the minibus. Winning bids usually result in fees from K10,000 to K15,000 a day paid to the owner, after which the driver can keep the additional cash for gas and as profit.

Custom has been good, said Ko Wai Lin. "More people are riding in our minibuses because it's fast, takes less time and is more comfortable than a bus," he said. "I think we are helping public transportation to improve."

The firm is also keen to end its unofficial ways – according to Ko Wai Lin, he, along with other the owners of 50 other minibuses, have applied to become a legal bus line under the name "Aung Soe Moe".

Currently drivers from the line must give parking fees to Yangon City Development Committee, though they face little headache from its dubious legality. Still, Ko Wai Lin says it is important to try to become a legal bus line.

"We don't want to be illegal. Right now we need to avoid the police because if we meet them there might trouble."

Ma Ame rides from Yuzana Garden City to downtown daily on a minibus, and said it's not much more expensive and is usually more comfortable than the bus lines. "It's safer, usually, except sometimes I have to sit in a minibus that's crowded with other people," he said.

"But this isn't a real problem – it's just an easier way to get around."

Puma and PTT left standing in race for refinery

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TWO firms are still competing for the rights to join Myanmar Petrochemical Enterprise in refitting for the Thanlyin Refinery Joint Venture Project, according to a statement.

Although about 20 international companies had initially signaled interest in the project, only four submitted proposals. The list has now been narrowed to two, PTT and Puma Energy, which meet the general requirements to proceed, a December 24 announcement said.

"The tender evaluation and selection committee will conduct a general evaluation on rules and requirements for these two companies with the deposit of a US$4 million bid bond," said MPE managing director Daw Hla Hla Kyi. The bond is to last for nine months.

The other two companies that did not pass to the next round are Itemitsu Kosan from Japan and Omni Focus from Myanmar. Omni Focus belongs to U Aye Ne Win and U Kyaw Ne Win, grandsons of former dictator Ne Win. The pair made headlines early this year after claims they had purchased 60 percent of Asia Green Development Bank from business tycoon U Tay Za.

Daw Hla Hla Kyi said the details of the two proposals from Puma and PTT will now be closely examined.

The dated Thanlyin refinery has a capacity of 20,000 barrels per day, and is run by MPE, though its production rates are in decline.

MORE ON BUSINESS 25

Policy aims to lure automobile factories

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A DOMESTIC car production industry may take shape in the future as a national plan is drawn up, though for now imported vehicles dominate, according to experts.

Neighbouring countries such as Thailand have had success with their own auto assembly plants. Myanmar has also experimented with its own domestic production efforts – the results of which in some cases still ply the country's roads – though they have fallen out of favour, with consumers been quick to shift to foreign imports as they become increasingly available.

Myanmar Engineering Society patron U Khin Maung Kyaw said there are about 85 million cars produced worldwide each year, of which 4.5 million are made in ASEAN – mainly Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

"These countries sell vehicles to the local market and also abroad," he said. "As for Myanmar, even if we can't export to another country, we should try to decrease imports from them."

Past attempts to assemble cars locally using imported parts had been unsuccessful as the vehicles were generally of poor quality. In the future, Myanmar will attempt to lure foreign auto manufacturers to set up shop in the country rather than restarting domestic companies.

The Myanmar Engineering Society has been drawing up an automobile policy for the last two years with government input, hoping to build a foundation for an auto industry.

"Lots of people are interested in cars," said U Khin Maung Kyaw.

Drawing international manufacturers to set up shop in Myanmar will be difficult, with few confirmed plans for a factory in the country.

Japanese automaker Nissan announced in September 2013 that it will begin manufacturing Nissan Sunny cars by 2015 at a plant in Bago Region, with maximum production of 10,000 vehicles a year. Other automakers say they may set up in the future, though note that challenges remain.

Earlier this year, Hisayuke Inoue, president of Toyota Asia Pacific Engineering and Manufacturing, said the company has no plans to build a plant in Myanmar in the next five years, though may in the future consider an investment.

Part of this is due to anticipated tax reductions under the ASEAN free trade area, which will mean vehicles produced in places like Thailand will be able to be imported to Myanmar duty-free.

'Even if we can't export to another country, we should try to decrease imports from them.'

U Khin Maung Kyaw
Myanmar Engineering Society

Previous efforts to build domestic vehicle production capacity often involved assembling imported spare parts. Photo: Staff

U Khin Maung Kyaw said car factories require huge investments but would also significantly boost GDP.

"We can get revenue and Myanmar citizens can get jobs," he said. "If we import from other countries, we must pay a lot of money to others."

"Foreign investors like Myanmar's situation. We have a lot of land and human resources. But they dare not invest because Myanmar has no law or policy for the automobile industry."

U Khin Maung Kyaw said he hopes to have a policy ready for the hluttaw's approval in early 2016.

"Myanmar has so many good points and we can build an industry by cooperating with foreign countries," he said. "We are carefully considering our automotive policy so foreign investors want to invest."

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Shifting top taxpayers as KBZ leads lists

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KANBAWZA Bank was once again the largest income tax payer last year, though there were significant shifts among the rest of the top 10 commercial and income tax payers for the 2013-14 financial year.

Kanbawza Bank, which often brands as KBZ, paid K17 billion in tax during the 2013-14 fiscal year. Its payments were more than triple the next three companies, Asia World, Shwe Taung Development and Max Myanmar, according to the annual list of top taxpayers released by the Internal Revenue Department last week.

"Paying tax regularly every year is a benefit for the country, also it builds our reputation as a bank that our customers trust," said Kanbawza Bank vice chair U Than Lwin.

Reforming tax laws and more equitably applying the laws would address the weakness of tax avoiding.

"There are a few organisations bigger than Kanbawza, but they're not included in the list of large taxpayers. I don't want to blame them, but hopefully changing the policies will attract them to participate in a society of taxpayers," he said.

There were also companies on the list which shifted considerably over last year/

Global Treasure Bank, formerly Myanmar Livestock and Fishery Development Bank, had not been ranked for 2012-13, but this year shot up the list to being the 5th largest income tax payer and 2nd-highest bank.

Bank director U Kyaw Lwin explained the increase by saying it had rapidly expanded its branch network last year and was also paying a higher rate of tax.

"Opening branches in areas with transactions is the main thing we did this year, and it's been going well," he said. "On the other hand, we can trim our body [of workers], meaning we are using more skillful staff rather than just more employment."

The Internal Revenue Department each year releases a list of the top income and commercial tax payers, eventually publishing a book of the top 500 taxpayers.

The two highest commercial taxpayers for 2013-14 were Myawaddy Trading, which is under the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited, and Dagon Beverages, which is under the Myanmar Economic Corporation.

Myanmar Brewery and Rothmans of Pall Mall, generally two of the top companies on the list, this year were included on the list of highest foreign taxpayers, both at more than K10 billion.

Ministry of Commerce director U Win Myint said some trade facilitation policies are causing more trading companies to be higher taxpayers.

Top income taxpayers

Rank	2013-14 taxpayer	Tax revenue	Type of business	2012-13 taxpayer
1	Kanbawza Bank Ltd	More than K17 billion	Bank	Kanbawza Bank
2	Asia World Co	Under K5 billion	Trading	Myanmar Brewery
3	Shwe Taung Group	Under K5 billion	Trading	International Beverages
4	Max (Myanmar) Construction	Under K5 billion	Trading	Myanmar CP Livestock
5	Global Treasure Bank	Under K4 billion	Bank	Shwe Taung Development
6	International Beverages	Under K4 billion	Trading	Co-operative Bank
7	Co-operative Bank	Under K4 billion	Bank	Max (Myanmar) Construction
8	Myanma Apex Bank	Under K3 billion	Trading	Dagon Beverages
9	Elite Tech IT Service	Under K3 billion	Services	Shwe Me' Co
10	Denko Trading Co	Under K3 billion	Trading	Asia World Co

Top commercial taxpayers

Rank	2013-14 taxpayer	Tax revenue	Type of business	2012-13 taxpayer
1	Myawaddy Trading	More than K10 billion	Trading	Myanmar Brewery Ltd
2	Dagon Beverages	More than K10 billion	Production	Rothmans of Pall Mall Myanmar
3	Denko Trading Co	Under K10 billion	Trading	Dagon Beverages Co
4	International Beverages Co	Under K10 billion	Trading	International Beverages
5	City Mart Holding	Under K5 billion	Trading	Myanmar CP Livestock
6	New Day Energy Co	Under K 5 billion	Trading	City Mart Holding
7	Myanma Economic Holding Co	Under K5 billion	Trading	Premier Coffee Co
8	Asia Energy Trading	Under K5 billion	Trading	Yathar Cho Industry
9	Ayar Jade Co	Under K5 billion	Gems	Max (Myanmar) Manufacturing
10	Shwe Me' Co	Under K5 billion	Production	Straits Greenfield Ltd

Source: Internal Revenue Department

Refinery tender continues

CONTINUED FROM BUSINESS 21

The Ministry of Energy has been looking to rehabilitate the refinery since last year through a joint venture with a private company.

The selected international company will be invited to join MPE in a venture to rehabilitate the refinery, as well as undertaking importation, distribution and storage of a range of products, according to the announcement.

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Number of companies that initially showed interest in the Thanlyin refinery – though only 2 are now left competing

"We expect to finalise the process in 2015, around August or September," said Daw Hla Hla Kyi.

Applicants are required to have at least three consecutive years of management experience at a refinery facility with total production of at least 500,000 barrels per day, as well as a minimum three years' experience running crude oil import, distribution and storage businesses with capacity of at least 20 million barrels annually.

Thailand state-owned PTT and Singapore-based Puma Energy are two of the more prominent investors vying for Myanmar energy projects.

PTT already has upstream production projects in the country, while Puma last year won a tender for oil storage at Thilawa special economic zone and two weeks ago received the rights to partner in distributing jet fuel.

WASHINGTON

Strong US growth raise recovery hopes

THE US economy is growing at an increasingly rapid pace, government data released on December 23 shows, raising hopes that a slow-going American recovery is transforming into a far more robust expansion.

The 5 percent annualised growth reported on December 23 for the three-month period ending in September has led some analysts to believe that the US economy could expand next year at a clip reminiscent of the booming late 1990s.

But while that period was driven by a surge in commerce unleashed by computers and the internet, this expansion has many drivers. They include brisk consumer spending, low levels of personal debt, plunging oil prices, a soaring stock market and a federal government that for the first time in years is encouraging growth rather than detracting from it.

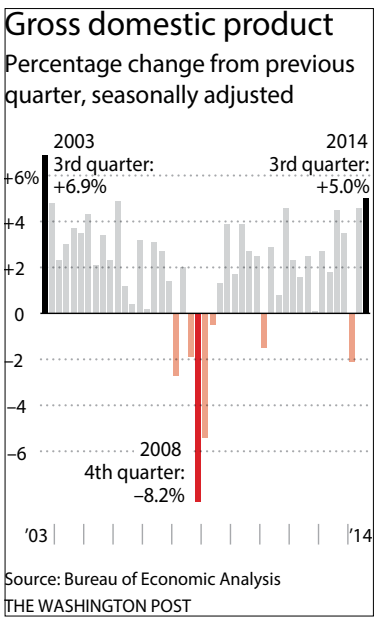
The period of relative prosperity – third-quarter economic growth was the best in 11 years – is even more striking because it contrasts with what is happening in much of the rest of the rich world, with Japan and countries in Europe teetering on the edge of recessions, if they are not already in them.

The better-than-expected economic numbers helped push the Dow Jones industrial average to another record high, with the index closing above 18,000 for the first time. The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index also edged up and closed at a record high.

The numbers come as the economy has shown other signs of improvement – including an unemployment rate that is down to 5.8pc. The economy created 321,000 jobs in November, part of the strongest trend in job growth since the late 1990s.

"We've had this two-steps-forward-one-step-back kind of expansion – a good quarter and a reversion – but it seems like this is different this time," said Scott Anderson, chief economist at the Bank of the West.

Few expect a repeat of the strong third-quarter growth anytime soon. Though the United States has seen six months of booming expansion, including growth at a 4.6pc annualised rate in the second quarter, the first quarter of the year was dragged down by a brutal East Coast winter that kept shoppers indoors.



Consumer spending, which accounts for about two-thirds of gross domestic product, has emerged as the economy's driving force, increasing in the third quarter by 3.2pc. Though incomes have stagnated for years among the middle and lower classes, there were nascent signs of wage growth last month, and households have reduced the bad debt that held them back in the wake of the financial crisis.

Consumer sentiment is at a post–recession high, and the nation has seen its best year of hiring in a decade and a half. Consumers have also gotten help from falling oil prices, which amount to a de facto tax cut that saves each driver hundred of dollars annually at the pump.

– Bloomberg

HONG KONG

Airplane graveyard planned for China's 'Ice City' as new orders continue to soar

CHINA, poised to become the world's biggest buyer of new planes, also wants to build a graveyard for old aircraft.

China Aircraft Leasing Group Holdings is investing US$2 billion to build the country's largest plane disassembly plant in Harbin – known as China's "Ice City" – some 750 miles (1200 kilometres) northeast of Beijing. The facility starts operation in 2017 and aims to tear apart 50 jets annually after five years, chief executive officer Mike Poon said at a press conference in Hong Kong December 18.

"The headlines for aircraft in Asia are about new deliveries, but there will be significant retirement of old aircraft," said Will Horton, a Hong Kong-based analyst at the CAPA Centre for Aviation. "You need a robust system to catalog the parts to sell them in foreign markets."

China's foray into the field comes as Boeing, the world's largest plane maker, also is exploring ways to wring money from the end of a jetliner's life. With the value of parts potentially outweighing an old jet's resale price, the $3.2-billion-a-year market for used aircraft parts is growing as companies discard planes well before the end of their 30-year life cycles.

The scrap-aircraft industry is concentrated mainly in the United States, a mix of closely held operators such as Aircraft Demolition – which works out of Arizona's Pinal Airpark, known for its open-air storage, and publicly traded companies like AAR Corp.

Some 48pc of all aircraft deliveries in the past five years were to replace ageing planes, compared with the historical average of 43pc, said China Aircraft Leasing, also known as CALC, citing data from Ascend Flight Global Consultancy. In April, the Washington-based Aircraft Fleet Recycling Association said as many as 1800 aircraft will be dismantled around the world in the next three years, citing industry operators. From leasing, sale and leaseback to disassembly services, CALC is committed to becoming a one-stop, full-life-cycle aircraft solutions provider, the firm said in a statement.

Typically, deserts are seen as ideal spots for disassembly, since the dry conditions reduce corrosion. More than 60 companies are based out of Mojave Air & Space Port in California, one of the world's leading centers for flight testing, space technology, and jet maintenance and storage.

In contrast, Harbin is known for its bitterly cold winters and annual ice sculpture festival. The city, which is also the capital of Heilongjiang province, is the heart of China's industrial northeast.

'The headlines for aircraft in Asia are about new deliveries, but there will be significant retirement of old aircraft.'

Will Horton
Aviation analyst

"It would be interesting to see what the exact plans are and how they plan to accommodate Harbin's long and cold winters," CAPA's Mr Horton said. "Disassembly is normally done outdoors."

CALC's Mr Poon said that the plant's operational model will not require as much storage space as those elsewhere. The plant will be located near the Harbin Taiping International Airport. Harbin was chosen because the city has an existing aerospace industrial presence.

The sector is in its infancy in China, with the first disassembly carried out just last year by GA Innovation China, according to a statement on the company's website. The company is a venture between GA Telesis LLC and Air China Ltd.

CALC's proposed facility is part of a broader plan to revive China's northeast. Brazilian aircraft manufacturer Embraer has an assembly facility in Harbin, a joint venture with Aviation Industry Corporation of China.

China is expected to be a driving force in the aviation industry in coming years. The country will need about 5300 new planes, valued at $820 billion, by 2033, Airbus Group NV said December 10. That represents 17pc of global demand for new planes in the next 20 years.

Earlier this year, Boeing forecast that more than 6000 of its planes will go to China through 2033, about 40pc of the company's Asian deliveries. Last month, CALC placed a $10.2 billion order for 100 Airbus single-aisle A320 planes.

"With the prompt development of China's aviation industry and the rapid expansion of airlines' fleet, the number of old retiring aircraft has been increasing every year," CALC said in a December 4 statement.

Potential regulatory hurdles to CALC's plan remain. It's unclear whether the current practise in China to restrict imports of jetliners more than 10 years old, and air freighters above 15 years old, would apply to planes brought there just to be taken apart, said Dennis Lau, an aviation analyst with Ascend.

CALC's Mr Poon said the plant will initially focus on the China market and the company is in talks with the local government on possible policy changes. *– Bloomberg*

MANILA

Philippine miners riding a nickel boom

MICHAEL Defensor is racing to mine and ship nickel from projects across the Philippines to plug the gap in global supplies left by Indonesia's ore-export curbs.

"Indonesia's ban affected us positively," said Mr Defensor, chair of Pax Libera Mining Inc and the nation's environment secretary from 2004 to 2006. He's preparing four new sites for next year after opening two in the past two years. "We will maximise this window and ship as much as we can."

Michael Defensor, chair of Pax Libera Mining Inc., says his company is preparing four new mining sites.
Photo: Bloomberg

The Indonesian curbs, designed to promote local processing, started in January 2014 and were upheld in court this month. The ban initially drove prices to a two-year high in May, before larger-than-expected Philippine exports and slowing Chinese growth reversed the rally. Citigroup says it's still bullish on nickel because the country won't be able to expand supply much more and a global shortage will emerge.

Futures on the London Metal Exchange, the global benchmark for the metal used to make stainless steel, traded at US$15,750 a metric ton on December 22, from this year's high of $21,625 in May. The price is still 13 percent higher for the year, making nickel the best performing industrial metal on the LME.

"Everyone will try to max out their permit," said Ramon Advienteo, a mining analyst at Maybank ATR Kim Eng Securities in Manila. "The low-hanging fruit has already been harvested even before the ban, so there is probability that the Philippines won't meet the gap" left by Indonesia, he said.

While ore exports from the Philippines to China rose 24pc to 31.2 million tons in the first 10 months, some of that came from stockpiles, Citigroup analysts wrote in a December 1 report. Volumes probably won't expand much in 2015 even with more mining, they said.

Ore from the Philippines typically has less nickel content than from Indonesia, which was the world's largest mined producer before the ban.

The global market will swing to a deficit of 62,400 tons in 2015 from a 25,100-ton surplus in 2014, according to Citigroup, which expects prices to average $21,625 next year and $25,250 in 2016. Goldman Sachs has a 2015 forecast of $17,500, rising to $20,000 in 2016, and Morgan Stanley listed nickel this month as its top metals pick for 2015.

The forecasts for supply shortages contrast with gains in global inventories. Those tracked by the LME surged to a record this year, expanding 55pc to 406,812 tons by December 19.

Economic growth in China, the biggest buyer of ore from Southeast Asia and the largest nickel user, is slowing to the weakest since 1990.

The Philippines undermined the bullish outlook for nickel, shipping more ore than expected, Credit Suisse Group analysts said in a December 15 report. They cut their 2015 forecast by 21pc to $17,625, citing in part the "mighty influx" of metal into LME–monitored warehouses.

Nickel Asia Corporation, the Philippines's biggest producer, is among those gaining from the ban. Ore sales rose 38pc in the first nine months, boosting profit more than fourfold to a record. Shares of the company have tripled this year as the Philippine Stock Exchange Index climbed 21pc.

More companies are seeking permits, said Leo Jasareno, director of the Manila–based Mines & Geosciences Bureau. The office authorised two more nickel mines this year, including one for TVI Pacific Inc. pending for about 15 years, he said.

"If Indonesia's ban goes on we'll see more new mines in five years," Mr Jasareno said. "Nickel will be the darling of mining in the next 10 years."

Each of the four new mines may produce about 2 million tons of ore a year, Mr Defensor said. Its Tawi Tawi project in the Mindanao region may provide as much as 3 million tons, he said. It can operate year-round, whereas mines in some other areas have to halt for months during the annual rainy season.

"Ore is in demand and there are many aggressive buyers," said Mr Defensor. "We'll keep the machine efficient, so when the ban ends and prices correct, we can still operate."

– Bloomberg

Economic reform in 2015 out of the world's spotlight

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NEXT year could the most important for Myanmar's economic transition since the heady days that followed the transition from a military to a civilian government. The world's attention may be drifting away, the spotlight drawn by any number of international concerns, while some circling investors appear flummoxed by the pace of change. The expectations of foreign investors have also become more realistic, with the realisation setting in that change cannot take place in just a year or two.

Yet Myanmar, for the first time in the modern era, is firmly on the international business community's radar. Approved FDI hit US$3.6 billion from April to September – nearly as much as for the entire previous fiscal year.

While it is still far from the billions China pumped in at the tail end of the military regime, investment is increasingly being directed into labour-intensive industries, including manufacturing, construction and tourism. Tourism arrivals look set to hit 3 million for 2014, compared with less than 1 million in 2011.

The two private telcos, Telenor and Ooredoo, have finally set up, ushering in a wave of change in an embarrassingly outdated sector. Nine foreign banks were also selected in October to open next year for the first time since the nationalisations of the Ne Win regime, constituting more evidence of Myanmar's commitment to encouraging foreign investment.

Myanmar may drift further from its hold on the world's attention in 2015, particularly compared to two or three years ago, but foreign investors have already taken notice. Some have already taken the plunge to invest, while for many others Myanmar is on their radar and they will be closely watching to see when the time is right to bring their business.

Foremost among the concerns of potential foreign investors is politics, particularly entering an election year. A flood of foreign, particularly Western, interest began taking stock of the country in 2011. Though much of it never materialised into actual investment, some prominent firms like General Electric and Coca-Cola have set up shop.

'There is a unanimity of desire among Myanmar people to reform the systems.'

Eric Rose
Lawyer

Some experts say a successful election could set off a second wave of foreign interest in the country.

"I do think there will be a second rush, that's for sure," said prominent entrepreneur Serge Pun during a November interview. "Because I'm optimistic the elections will again prove one thing – that we are again in the right direction, and that regardless of who wins, the economic policy of reform, level playing fields, open doors, would be the most important foundation for any government."

"If we turn socialist, then god help us, but I think it's not likely, whoever wins. And when that fact, that truth, is established post–election, then I think you will see another wave of investors rushing in."

Government officials say making Myanmar an attractive destination for investors is a process that will require time and patience. "Foreign investment is different from trading, it takes more than a few days," said U Aung Naing Oo, secretary of the Myanmar Investment Commission, which approves large–scale investment projects.

"No investors come as soon as a country opens up. They assess the situation and make surveys for about two years before setting up a business. Some have come, taken a look and then gone back – that doesn't mean they don't want to be here, but that they've decided not to come now."

As senior officials acknowledge, there are plenty of challenges to building an investor-friendly investment climate – with lots of work needed to improve areas like the macroeconomic environment, human resources, financial capacity and infrastructure.

"Like in many countries that are Asian, we also have many problems," said U Set Aung, deputy governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar, during a speech on December 12. "We don't call them problems, we call them challenges. It's a kind of sexy word we like to use. So we have many challenges, actually, and some of the problems are internal and some of them are external."

Although economic reforms aren't coming as quickly or as comprehensively as many would like, progress is being made. When US President Barack Obama visited Myanmar last month, he pointed to a few areas where reforms were slowing down or backsliding during an interview with *The Irrawaddy*. However, the economy was one of the areas he singled out as continuing to move forward.

European Union ambassador to Myanmar Roland Kobia said a strengthening economy is important to continuing reform in the overall country. "If Myanmar generates business it will help to democratise the country and improve its relationship to the rest of the world. Doing business will strengthen the democratic power transition," he said on the sidelines of a December 12 event.

As U Set Aung pointed out in his speech, the Myanmar economy is also significantly influenced by other, much larger, economies. Nevertheless, observers say it is important not to lose sight of the need for continuing economic reforms regardless of the international business climate. Investors from countries like Japan, China and the European Union may shy away from Myanmar due to challenges at home – though there are significant domestic hurdles that need to be removed.

"The current government is trying to address challenges head-on," said Eric Rose, lead director at Herzfeld Rubin Meyer and Rose legal firm. Still, it takes two to tango, and foreign officials and investors must be willing to work with their Myanmar counterparts. It will take time to build these strong relationships and levels of trust, according to Mr Rose.

"There is still a substantial amount of incredulity that foreigners really, really want to help Myanmar and that obviously will take years [to overcome]," he said.

As some of the world's focus on Myanmar has begun to dissipate, concern over the reform process has been growing.

"Am I just as optimistic today as I was a year ago? The answer is no. I fear that there is a wave of concerns both domestic and international that are now taking over the discourse as opposed to continuing the reform process." But on the whole, Mr Rose said he still counts himself as an optimist about the country's future.

"There is a unanimity of desire among Myanmar people to reform the systems and continue those reforms going forward," he said.

Now that the spotlight is beginning to move away from Myanmar, it may finally now have the breathing space it needs to address the biggest challenges – problems – facing the business environment. During 2015, the direction of future economic reform will become much more clear.

Cuba opening draws Myanmar parallels

FOR companies seeking Miami attorney Pedro Freyre's advice on how to exploit US President Barack Obama's opening to Cuba, two stories may serve as cautionary tales.

One concerns an 18-hole golf course that took a Canadian designer eight years to build near the island's famed Varadero beaches. The second involves the rooftop cell-phone towers that a Norwegian firm has struggled to erect halfway around the world in Myanmar.

While the embargo is still in place, US President Barack Obama's move December 17 to re-establish diplomatic relations "changes the tone of the conversation", says Mr Freyre, chair of the international practice of Akerman. While new opportunities such as in the telecoms industry may be permitted, along with the sale of food and medicine already allowed, he cautions that doing business in Cuba is difficult. "In their heart of hearts, the rulers of the country don't believe in capitalism," he says.

For all the attention on Cuba because of its role in the Cold War, Fidel Castro's out-sized personality and the political clout of Miami's exile community in US politics, it remains a small–market country of 11 million people. Comparisons with other communist countries where the U.S. has normalised relations – China with its 1.4 billion population and Vietnam with almost 90 million – are tempting. Yet for the challenges of moving into a transition economy, Myanmar may serve as a better example.

Myanmar began attracting foreign investment in 2012, when the European Union and US began easing sanctions after political changes that ended about five decades of direct military control.

Restrictions remain, with US individuals and companies barred from investing or doing business with people with links to the army's repression of the democracy movement. Among those whose names have been removed from the list are President U Thein Sein and parliamentary speaker Thura U Shwe Mann, former junta members who have been at the forefront of the new government. "This is a serious challenge for western investors because not only American companies abide by those requirements," said Romain Caillaud, managing director of Vriens & Partners, a political risk consulting firm. "It means you need to do a lot of background checks to be absolutely sure who your business partner is."

'In their heart of hearts, the rulers of [Cuba] don't believe in capitalism.'

Pedro Freyre
Lawyer

Investment in Myanmar since the sanctions eased has been disappointing, according to Erin Murphy, a former Central Intelligence Agency analyst who is the founder of the Inle Advisory Group, and James Clad, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asia Pacific Security Affairs during the George W Bush administration.

US companies such as General Electric, Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble have invested more than $600 million since 2012, "a number that is impressive but does not approach anticipated levels," Ms Murphy and Mr Clad wrote in a National Bureau of Asian Research note published November 4.

"The major 'gold rush' of investment has not reached expected levels; instead, the majority of US corporations have delayed entry into Myanmar due to the overwhelming and complex investment challenges," they wrote.

It's not just these Havana restaurant promoters that are being checked out: Cuba is also grabbing the world's attention as relations with the US warm. Photo: AFP

Norway's Telenor has experienced some of those challenges after winning an auction for one of two mobile licences last year and rolling out the first phase of service to 2 million customers in Myanmar.

To build towers and erect antennas, Telenor had to gain access to thousands of small land plots and rooftops across the country. That was complicated by land-rights issues, the lack of a national-property database and inefficiency in processing applications, the company's Myanmar chief executive officer Petter Furberg said in an email.

In its risk analysis, Telenor realised Myanmar lacked the workforce needed to run a modern mobile telecoms operation, Mr Furberg said.

"While there are myriad challenges to sort out every day, it is very obvious that change is wanted and welcome among the people of Myanmar," he said. "But success will require patience, perseverance, executive presence and a long–term perspective."

Such qualities were needed by Canadian golf-course designer Les Furber while building Cuba's first 18-hole course since the 1959 revolution. Started in 1990, the $4 million project took eight years to complete, said Mr Furber, 68, co-founder of GDS Golf Course Design Services Ltd in Alberta, Canada.

A shortage of diesel fuel, tires and batteries, in part because of the US embargo, shut down equipment, and Cuba's lack of credit made obtaining materials difficult, he said. "It was fun, but frustrating sometimes," he said, and "not lucrative in any sense".

Another 18-hole golf course is part of the Carbonera Club, a 400-acre luxury resort that's been five years in planning by British company Esencia Experiences near Varadero and has yet to start construction.

Prospects will be limited for American companies until Congress lifts the embargo, said Andrew Zimbalist, an economist at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, who has studied Cuba extensively. "As for trade, it is still a small country with low per capita income so to compare it to China or Vietnam isn't reasonable," he said.

Foreign investors also remain cautious given Cuba's insistence on a majority stake in most ventures, and complicated work arrangements, he said. Companies usually must contract with state agencies to hire employees, who are paid in pesos with bonuses sometimes allowed in dollars or goods.

Mr Obama said December 19 that the full opening of relations between Cuba and the US may take years, even as he offered assurances that the new US stance will bring change to the island nation's closed society. While the changes won't open Cuba to US tourism, they will make it easier for American businesses to export to Cuba's construction, telecommunications and agricultural sectors. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker is planning a trade mission to the island.

Yet Cuba has not made any commitment to democracy and its opening of the economy has been very controlled and rooted in pragmatism, not a change in ideology, he said. "This is not Myanmar, Vietnam or China – it's a little bit of each." – *Bloomberg*

Property

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Property transactions slowed in 2014

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A pedestrian walks past recently built condos in Dawbon township. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

THE rate of property transactions likely dropped in 2014 following two years of heady growth, according to experts.

While 2012 and 2013 saw an unprecedented boom in buying, concerns the market may be overheating and government moves to curb runaway prices together dampened purchases.

Phoenix real estate agent Ko Htun Htun said he reckons purchase volumes were down about 50 percent in 2014 compared year-on-year.

"2014 was not a good year for the property market," he said. "Land dealing slowed, and there was some turmoil – but next year should be better."

The year had started strong, particularly in Yangon's outskirts, industrial zones and government projects, but even there transactions have fallen off.

There were also significant speculation bubbles, including the mysterious Yangon New City craze begun in August when Yangon Region mayor U Hla Myint announced a massive greenfield project was to be built to the city's southwest, including 20,000 homes and six large bridges on 30,000 acres to the west of the city between the Pan Hlaing River, Twante Canal and Hlaing River.

Critics jumped on the plan and the mayor subsequently said the project is on hold, though not before property in the southwest rural townships shot up in value, often by multiples of three or four in just a few weeks.

Other government moves had a calming effect on the market. Some experts say standardising property values used to assess taxes on property transactions had the effect of slowing the market. Previously, the tax was charged as a percentage on a property's declared value, though this opened the door to some declaring too-low values. In 2013 the government changed to a system where each Yangon neighbourhood had its own value that was used automatically to determine the tax, though the values themselves were changed again in October 2014.

"After the government made the values higher for property tax, the market suddenly slowed down," said U Khin Maung Aye, an agent from Shwe Kan Myae real estate. "Dealers are no longer looking to buy land and some want to sell out quickly."

Another factor behind the recent property market slowdown are the astronomical prices. Some property, such as high-grade office space, rivals the most expensive units in places like Singapore and Manhattan, and nearly all property values in Yangon have seen significant increases over the past years.

"High land prices is one reason the market has paused. Land values are high and they are not backing off, and the land prices and market are connected to each other," said Ko Htun Htun.

High land prices discourage investment, he added.

It is no coincidence that areas with the most trading are also the areas with lower land prices. While lots in downtown may cost over K1 billion (US$1 million), some townships like Thingangyun have lots selling for about one-10th the price. Even further afield areas, like North Dagon township, have been hit by high prices.

Earlier this year, outskirts like North Dagon had strong transaction markets. There used to be interest from dealers, but when land prices got high enough, transactions again began to slow down.

A cool market is a departure from 2013, when downtown areas were seeing prices rise, but investor interest continue unabated. Declining transactions may show that prices have peaked, at least for now.

While the sales market has slowed, the leasing market has seen continued growth, as more and more people look for space in the city.

Ma Myat Thu, an agent at Moe Myint Thaw Da real estate, said much of the interest is driven by foreigners, with housing and office space rents still expensive. She said it is unlikely the rental market will slow, given the influx of people coming to Myanmar.

The coming year is hard to predict. While there is talk of a bubble, it's also true that in many areas, demand outstrips supply. Changes in government policy, such as the Yangon New City rollercoaster, are also hard to foresee.

Government officials have recognised an overheated property market may dissuade development, and are looking at ways to address concerns.

What's clear is the property sector will continue to be a centre of speculation in 2015.

HOUSE OF THE WEEK

Adding just a dash of home

There's something clinical about this week's home in Kamaryut township. It may have been a dentist practice, or the headquarters of one of the more humourless NGOs in town.

Yet it's a well-built home, with high ceilings and a large compound in a quiet area. The two-storey house is a total of 1200 square feet in a large 4200-square-foot compound. It has three master bedrooms, one smaller bedroom, a living room, dining room and kitchen.

Certainly the large yard could use some greenery, and the interior a dash of the touch that makes a house a home. If you'd like a project – or are a dentist practice or one of the more humourless NGOs – this is a solid option.

Some furnishings are included, such as beds, chairs, a sofa, fridge and washing machine, but it does need a little more. The building is near northern Yangon, so if you see yourself travelling frequently to Inya Lake or Yangon University, this option will work for you.

As far as villas go, it's not too expensive and has a fine location to boot. As always, you can give negotiating a shot.– *Tin Yadanar Htun*

Location : Aung Myae Tharsi housing, Kamaryut township.
Price : $4500 per month (negotiable)
Contact : Power 7 Real Estate Agency
Phone : 0949214276

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"There is still a substantial amount of incredulity that foreigners really, really want to help Myanmar and that obviously will take years [to overcome]."

— Eric Rose, Herzfeld Rubin Meyer and Rose legal firm

Chinese get into the Christmas spirit with a shopping spree

WORLD 35

BEIJING

Builder rides transformation to riches

WANG Jianlin rose from local bureaucrat to China's richest man by transforming a debt-laden state-owned housebuilder into the sprawling Wanda Group, and the flotation of one of its subsidiaries on December 23 may propel him back up a rich list now dominated by internet moguls.

Mr Wang has penchants for karaoke and collecting, and has an impressive selection of fine art, property projects in top markets around the world, and an ever-expanding portfolio of companies including cinema chain AMC and yacht builder Sunseeker.

He topped the Forbes China Rich List in 2013 with an estimated net worth of US$14.1 billion, but was displaced this year by charismatic internet entrepreneur Jack Ma after he floated his e-commerce powerhouse Alibaba Group in the world's biggest-ever initial public offering (IPO). Mr Ma's fortune is now estimated at nearly $20 billion.

Mr Wang dropped to number four, though his ranking could rebound after Dalian Wanda Commercial Properties, the flagship subsidiary of Mr Wang's Wanda Group, raised $3.7 billion in an IPO earlier this month by selling a 13.4 percent stake.

The IPO valued the firm at $28 billion and Wanda Group's 44pc post-flotation share of the subsidiary at $12.5 billion.

Mr Wang himself owns more than 98pc of Wanda Group, with the remaining sliver held by his only son, Wang Sicong. Mr Wang and his wife together own around another 10 percent of Wanda Commercial.

The firm's shares debuted on December 23 in Hong Kong, closing down 2.6pc from the offering price at HK$46.75 ($6.03), on a gloomy outlook for China's oversupplied property market. The parent conglomerate, which has interests in hotels, entertainment and retail, last year saw $2.06 billion in profits, according to its website.

Wang Jianlin (centre), CEO of Dalian Wanda Commercial Properties Co Ltd, arrives before the company's IPO at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange on December 23. Photo: AFP

'Military rigour'

Mr Wang has sought to downplay speculation on the link between his success and his government ties, saying previously he wanted to build Wanda into a world class company "depending totally on the market, not government resources".

But he is unmistakably close to Beijing, clutching multiple official titles ranging from delegate to the ruling Communist Party congress in 2007 to a senior member of China's top political discussion chamber for five years until 2013.

Wanda Group is a far cry from the near-bankrupt, state-owned property developer in the northeastern port of Dalian when Mr Wang was appointed as general manager in 1988.

Previously a government official in the city's Xigang district, according to Chinese media reports, he dug his first pot of gold from contracts to renovate shanty houses in the area.

As the company turned around, it was renamed Wanda in 1992, and the state's stakes were gradually bought out by Mr Wang directly or through companies associated with him.

The eldest son of a captain of the Chinese Communist army during the civil war and Second World War and a veteran of the People's Liberation Army himself, Mr Wang runs Wanda Group "with military rigour and precision", *Fortune* magazine reported last year.

Nearly all his senior staff are men and wear black suits, white shirts and dark ties as a rule. Employees are provided with three free meals a day at strictly scheduled hours.

Wanda executives claim the company has "never once had a project come in late or over budget", the magazine said.

Dalian Wanda Commercial Properties says it is the second-largest commercial property owner and operator in the world, with 175 property projects across China.

Kidman, DiCaprio, Zeta-Jones

Mr Wang, 60, turned to culture and tourism as Wanda Group's new growth drivers in 2009, when the global financial crisis dealt China's real estate market a heavy blow.

The company has expanded into film production, theme parks, print media and art investment.

At a red-carpet event last year, global A-listers Nicole Kidman, Leonardo DiCaprio and Catherine Zeta-Jones flew in to showcase Wanda's plan for an $8 billion studio complex in the eastern city of Qingdao.

It has also expanded overseas, buying US cinema chain AMC Entertainment for $2.6 billion in 2012 and reportedly seeking a stake in Lions Gate Entertainment, the American studio behind the *Hunger Games* franchise.

Last year, it acquired a 23-floor office building in London for a luxury $1.1 billion development and bought Edificio Espana, a historic skyscraper in Madrid, for $330 million this June.

A month later, Wanda announced it would invest $900 million in a five-star hotel and apartment complex in Chicago, and acquired a huge parcel of land in Beverly Hills.

Through the company, Mr Wang has also accumulated around 1000 pieces of fine Chinese calligraphy and painting, and last year spent $28 million on Pablo Picasso's 1950 work "Claude and Paloma".

Wanda became a household name across China after Mr Wang, a diehard football fan, bought a Dalian soccer club in 1994 for six years and transformed it into the strongest team in China.

But Mr Wang's ambitions are bigger. He told CNN earlier this year: "Our goal is to make Wanda a brand like Wal-mart or IBM or Google – a brand known by everyone in the world, a brand from China." – *AFP*

NASA astronaut Scott Kelly (right) and Roscosmos cosmonaut Mikhail Kornienko of Russia give a press conference on December 18, 2014 at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. They will embark on a year-long mission to the International Space Station (ISS) in March 2015. Photo: AFP

No politics in space

US and Russian spacefarers say frayed relations on Earth haven't affected work on the International Space Station

US–RUSSIAN ties may have returned to Cold War levels, but an astronaut and a cosmonaut gearing up for the longest flight on the International Space Station said last week that politics would not disrupt their work of helping a future trip to Mars.

NASA's Scott Kelly and Mikhail Kornienko of the Russian space agency Roscosmos are to launch to the ISS in 2015 for a year–long stay designed to be a test for a future trip to Mars.

The ISS is a rare area of US-Russian cooperation that has not been hit by the Ukrainian crisis, which has prompted Washington to impose sanctions on Moscow.

In space, "we rely on each other implicitly for our lives," Kelly, 50, said at a press conference in Paris to showcase the mission.

"Any political issues that exist between our countries is something we don't even discuss. We're great friends, we're colleagues, we're professionals. That's the way it has to be."

Kornienko, 54, added, "There is no borders in space between us.

"It's a great example of ... working together, especially for politics on the ground."

Their spell will be the longest stay aboard the ISS since the orbital outpost in space was manned in 2000.

The longest ever space trip was by cosmonaut Valeriy Polyakov, who in 1994–5 spent 437 days in the Russian–Soviet station Mir.

Interest in long–duration flights has stirred anew with plans, still on the far horizon, for a manned trip to Mars around the 2030s.

That would be a quest that would take about three years round-trip.

It would also expose crew to problems ranging from bone density and muscle deterioration to DNA damage from space radiation, visual impairment and psychological stress.

"If we're ever going to go to Mars some day, the International Space Station is really a great platform to learn much about having people live and work in space for longer durations," said Kelly.

"It's close to the Earth and it's a great orbiting facility. This one year flight is one of many stepping stones towards leaving low–Earth orbit again," he said referring to the Apollo lunar landings, which ended in 1972.

NASA has 19 experiments planned into the impacts of long–term flight, and Roscosmos 14.

In total 16 countries work on the ISS, whose cost is mainly shouldered by the United States. Next year's stay will roughly double the current maximum stay of up to six months.

Since NASA phased out the space shuttle system in 2011, it depends entirely on Russia to send its astronauts to the ISS. The transport, aboard Soyuz rockets, costs the United States $70 million per person.

NASA is developing a four person capsule system, Orion, which took a first, unmanned, test flight on December 5.

Kornienko said that when he announced to his wife that he wanted to go into space for a year, she wept.

"But now she supports me, my family support me," said Kornienko, adding that he had become a proud grandfather.

The two men are veterans of space, with Kornienko notching up 176 days in orbit, and Kelly, a former space shuttle pilot, 180 days.

Asked whether being cooped up in the ISS for a year would be a strain on the friendship they had developed during long months in training, Kelly said he was confident.

"We are very good friends and we're going to better friends after a year in space – at least that's what I'm hoping for," he quipped.

Kelly said he hoped a manned trip to Mars "will happen in my lifetime."

"We, I think, have most of the technology to do it now. It's a matter of having a public and political willpower and want to invest the amount of money it's going to cost. But I think in the next 30 to 40 years we'll see that, hopefully sooner."

Added Kornienko, "Maybe earlier, I'm optimistic! But to do that we have to join our powers, it's not just one country, it [has to be] an international programme." *–AFP*

Commander Butch Wilmore works aboard the ISS. Photo: AFP

App developer expo coming in February

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DATES are set for Yangon's third annual app and software development conference, organizers announced last week.

AppExpo 2015 will run from February 19 to 20 at the MICT park, and will once again be organized by Yangon Heartz Media and Business Solutions, a local technology start-up.

In addition to giving local programmers and software engineers a chance to network, Yangon Heartz Media CEO U Zaw Zaw Myo Lwin told *The Myanmar Times* that this year's expo would include a US$500 prize for the 'best app,' to be chosen by a panel of judges at the event.

U Zaw Zaw Myo Lwin also said his company was in talks with several international software companies about presenting at the event, but he declined to name names.

U Thar Htet, chief software engineer from Zwenexsys software company, told *The Myanmar Times* that he and his team were looking forward to showcasing several of their recent apps at the expo. He said their crown jewel is Yote Shin, which searches for and displays Yangon movie showtimes.

ISTANBUL

Twitter whistleblower has Turkey guessing

HE has access to top-secret information, has been able to stay one step ahead of the authorities and is nearly always right.

Who is Fuat Avni, the mystery Turkish Twitter user who continues to correctly predict raids against critics of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan days before they take place?

The controversial swoop on media allied to exiled US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen – who Erdogan blamed for orchestrating a corruption probe to unseat him – was just the latest in over half a dozen such raids since the summer.

On each and every occasion, the raids have been correctly predicted by Fuat Avni before they took place, allowing the suspects to brace themselves for their arrest.

But no one has a firm idea of who Fuat Avni is and from where he obtains his information, leaving Turkey abuzz with rumours over the user's real identity.

Fuat Avni sent a message to his 650,000 followers from @fuatavnifuat on December 11, warning that police were set to detain some 400 people, including 147 journalists in the imminent December 12 raids.

"Tomorrow there will be an operation!" he tweeted, sharing a link to a website that named journalists – all working for media seen as critical of Mr Erdogan – that would be targeted in the raids.

Fuat Avni said reaction to his tweets forced the government to delay the raids for two days and reduce the number of journalists they were planning to arrest.

Over two dozen people, including top media figures and others, were eventually detained in the raids on December 14.

Fuat Avni claimed the operation was in revenge for last year's corruption probe launched almost exactly a year ago against members of Mr Erdogan's inner circle and that the next target would be those in the "mainstream media" seen as critical of the government.

Government officials take his tweets seriously.

"This is very serious and we need to consider it. I found the tweets to be a bit dangerous, as well," Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said of rumours voiced by Fuat Avni.

"I hope that this does not turn out to be real or at least that it does not occur at this scale," he said before the swoop.

The government had repeatedly moved to shut down Fuat Avni's Twitter account but the user continued tweeting under new handles.

Some say Fuat Avni is one of Mr Erdogan's close aides, while others believe he is an intelligence officer or even a CIA agent who wants to "stir up" the country.

Some think he is a pro-Gulen journalist with good contacts. There have even been somewhat fanciful suggestions he is a member of Mr Erdogan's own family, such as his wife Emine, who accompanies the president at all times.

He occasionally tweets nuggets of gossip about Mr Erdogan's private life, such as what he had for dinner, how he had trouble sleeping one night or what he would wear the next day – which has proved accurate from time to time.

In a "Twitter interview" with American news website Vocativ in July, Fuat Avni denied any links to Gulen and said his sole aim was to reveal the "dirty doings" of the government and "continue to do so until it collapsed".

He has a unique style that followers say aims to evoke suspense, give them hope that the collapse of the government is imminent and instil "fear" in Mr Erdogan, whom he always calls a "tyrant".

"Neither sulk, be pessimistic nor be hopeless, my beautiful people. These are traps of a collapsing fake dynasty," Fuat Avni, who says his alias means "a helping heart", wrote on December 14.

"The king is naked! You're naked but not a king. You're a tyrant!" another tweet wrote, referring to Mr Erdogan. – *AFP*

Cool Power Banks

by Myo Satt

Valore (VL-PB218)
This battery can store up to 10,000 mAh and is controlled by an easy-to-use touch-screen display. The device also includes two USB ports, allowing you to charge multiple gadgets at once. It takes 10 to 12 hours to recharge the device.
K29,500

Valore (VL-PB300)
A scaled-down version of the above model, this more portable option can store up to 5000mAh and also boasts a touch-screen display.
K27,000

Yoobao (YB-6014 Pro)
Despite the sleek and light design, this power bank packs quite the charge, up to 10,400mAh. A sputtering iPhone could conceivably be recharged five times before the Yoobao is spent.
K36,000

Yoobao (YB-665)
This external battery packs so much power (up to 15,000mAh) that it can double as a flashlight. It's the perfect gift for travelers who often find themselves in the daark.
K68,000

– Translation by Thiri Min Htun

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World

WORLD EDITOR: **Fiona MacGregor**

UNITED NATIONS

Security Council debates N Korean rights record

LAST week, the United States slammed North Korea as a "living nightmare" for its citizens at the first-ever UN Security Council meeting on Pyongyang's dismal rights record, held despite opposition from China.

The unprecedented talks at the 15-member council opened after China, Pyongyang's ally, failed to block the meeting, which convened even as North Korea faces US accusations of staging a cyber attack on a Hollywood studio.

US envoy Samantha Power said a UN commission of inquiry that compiled testimonies from North Korean exiles exposed the Pyongyang regime's brutality.

"They show North Korea for what it is: a living nightmare," she said.

Ms Power recalled testimony from a starving prison camp survivor who picked kernels of corn from cattle dung to eat and of a former guard who said prison wardens routinely raped prisoners.

The UN General Assembly put the international spotlight on North Korea when it adopted a landmark resolution last week urging the Security Council to consider referring Pyongyang to the International Criminal Court.

Approved by a resounding majority, the resolution drew heavily from the UN inquiry report released in February that detailed a vast network of prison camps holding up to 120,000 people, along with cases of torture, summary executions and rape.

The inquiry concluded that North Korea was committing human rights violations "without parallel in the contemporary world", and that these were ordered by the highest level of the state.

"Rarely has such an extensive charge sheet of international crimes been brought to the council's attention," UN assistant secretary-general for human rights Ivan Simonovic told the council.

British Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant called the report a "wake-up call" to the world about the appalling situation in North Korea and said Pyongyang should "listen and engage" to address rights concerns.

No decision was taken on December 22 on the call to refer North Korea to the ICC for crimes against humanity, but the United States, Britain, Australia and France among others said the council should consider taking action.

"By placing North Korea's appalling human rights record on its agenda, the Council can now at any point take the next step of referring these crimes against humanity to the ICC," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch.

The meeting opened with China raising objections, triggering a procedural raised-hand vote in which 11 of the 15 council members supported putting North Korea on the agenda.

China and Russia voted against while Chad and Nigeria abstained.

Chinese ambassador Liu Jieyi said de-nuclearisation, encouraging dialogue and maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula were the shared priorities of the global community.

"Getting involved in the human rights situation will go against the above goals and can only bring harm instead of benefits," said Mr Liu.

Until now, the top UN body has focused on North Korea's nuclear program as a security threat, and has imposed sanctions on Pyongyang over its nuclear and ballistic tests.

Under UN procedures, North Korea had the right to attend the council meeting and voice its views, but it decided to stay away. – *AFP*

WASHINGTON

This undated picture released from North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on December 8, 2014, shows North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un (left) inspecting Korean People's Army (KPA) air and anti-air force unit 458 at an undisclosed location in North Korea. Photo: AFP

N Korea internet goes black post-Sony hack

NORTH Korea's Internet went dark for several hours amid rumours of US retaliation over its alleged hacking of a Hollywood studio, just as the pariah state came under attack at the UN over its rights record.

It was not clear who or what had shut down Pyongyang's web connections, but cyber experts said the country's already limited internet went completely offline overnight from December 22 to 23 local time.

Piling further pressure on Kim Jong-Un's regime, UN members debated North Korea's brutal treatment of its huge prison population after China, its sole ally, was rebuffed in a bid to shelve the issue.

US-based internet analysts Dyn Research said Pyongyang's four online networks, all connected through Chinese telecom provider China Unicom, had been offline for nine hours and 31 minutes before services resumed in the morning of December 23.

Dyn Research said Pyongyang's very limited infrastructure could be vulnerable to power outages but that the way it had collapsed "seems consistent with a fragile network under external attack".

US President Barack Obama and the FBI have accused North Korea of being behind the hacking of Hollywood studio Sony Pictures, which was intimidated into cancelling a comedy film mocking Mr Kim.

Washington officials refused to comment on speculation that the North Korean Internet blackout was the first stage in what Mr Obama has warned will be a "proportionate response" to the hack.

North Korea has angrily insisted that it had nothing to do with the theft and leaking of Sony company secrets nor threats against moviegoers, but it has also condemned the madcap movie 'The Interview.'

US officials, however, called for compensation for Sony Pictures from North Korea.

"If they want to help here they could admit their culpability and compensate Sony for the damages that they caused," State Department deputy spokesperson Marie Harf told reporters.

Dyn Research said earlier that internet connectivity between North Korea and the outside world, never good at the best of times, had begun to show signs of instability over the weekend.

"This is different from short duration outages we have seen in the past," Earl Zmijewski, vice president of data analytics at Dyn, told AFP.

But Mr Zmijewski stressed it was impossible to say what had caused the outage. "They could have elected to simply pull the plug or they could have suffered from some sort of failure or attack," he said.

> **'They could have elected to simply pull the plug or they could have suffered some sort of failure or attack.'**
>
> **Earl Zmijewski**
> Vice President, Dyn Research

Pyongyang has called for a joint investigation into the Sony hack, and vowed reprisals if the US brings in new sanctions such as restoring the country to a list of state sponsors of terrorism.

The diplomatic row comes as China failed on December 21 to block the first-ever UN Security Council meeting on North Korea's dismal rights record after a strong majority of members voted in favor of it. (See related article at left.)

Adding to the tense, digital climate, South Korean officials said on December 23 that they are on high alert for a cyberattack.

Seoul's defence ministry said its cyber warfare unit increased its watch level against attacks from North Korean and other hackers, after the publication last week of a variety of information about the South's nuclear power plant operator on Twitter.

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye urged her cabinet on December 23 to beef up cyber security for nuclear power plants and other key infrastructure facilities.

"We must maintain a tight defence against cyber terrorism targeting nuclear power plants and other key facilities," she said.

Information leaks at nuclear power plants were serious crimes affecting "public safety", Ms Park said, calling for a "thorough" investigation into who was responsible.

North Korea has limited access to the worldwide web with just four networks on the global internet, compared to 150,000 in the United States, analysts say.

All of North Korea's routing is done through China Netcom, which is now part of China Unicom, Zmijewski said.

Washington has urged Beijing -- Pyongyang's closest ally -- to help rein in the North's cyber hacking activities, with US Secretary of State John Kerry speaking with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi over the weekend to discuss the problem.

China's foreign ministry on December 22 condemned "cyber terrorism" in any form but did not refer directly to North Korea.

Pyongyang's main internet presence is through its Uriminzokkiri website, which has Twitter and Flickr feeds and is best known for posting propaganda videos excoriating South Korea and the United States. – *AFP*

Athiest China gets into the Christmas spirit

WORLD 35

Malaysia battles growing obesity levels

WORLD 38

Dutch scientists use smell to recreate famous deaths

WORLD 36

HAVANA

Cubans await US visa fate at infamous 'Park of Sighs'

HUNDREDs of Cubans congregate each morning outside the US interests section in Havana, hoping to get an elusive visa to visit their relatives in the united States.

This office, set up to partially restore the diplomatic contact the US severed in 1961, was long the rallying point for anti-American protests spurred on by fiery speeches from communist leader Fidel Castro.

But it is also the spot where Cubans hope against all odds to get a US visa, a symbol of the complicated relations between the United States and the communist island 140 kilometres (90 miles) off its coast.

"I'm sure this time I'm going to pass the interview because I've prayed for it so much. I hope he'll grant me that miracle this time," said Elena Perez, 83, as she waited in a nearby square nicknamed the "Park of Sighs".

Cubans pay a non-refundable US$160 to apply for a visa, eight times the average monthly salary here.

Many paced up and down the park or smoked cigarettes as they waited for their interviews, but Perez, who traveled 404 miless from the eastern province of Las Tunas, sat on a bench exhausted.

"I've been to the United States three times and I've always come back. I don't see any reason why they would deny me a visa this time," she said, explaining that it had been three years since she had seen her son and four grandchildren in Miami.

She has been luckier than 78-year-old Yolanda Perez – no relation – who has been denied a visa three times.

Her son-in-law Luis Garcia, who has lived in Miami for 20 years, was at the interests section to help her apply.

"I guarantee Yolanda's not going to stay there. She has Parkinson's disease. Leaving her in a country where catching a cold costs you $10,000 would be crazy," he said.

As they weaved their way through the six different lines involved in the process, which can take up to five hours, many voiced hope that last week's announcement of a renewal in ties between the United States and Cuba would mean more visas.

But for now the sentence "You do not qualify to travel" is still heard often inside.

Since President Raul Castro took over from his older brother Fidel, the father of the Cuban Revolution, in 2006, he has loosened travel restrictions for Cubans.

The US has also made it easier for Cuban-Americans to visit the island and began issuing more visas for Cubans – up 27 percent to 19,500 between November 2013 and April 2014.

Thanks to the reforms, a record 327,600 people travelled between the two countries in the first half of the year.

Most travel to Miami, home to the largest Cuban diaspora worldwide.

Despite the increase, however, the number of Cubans who made the treacherous boat crossing to Florida rose sharply to 3722 in the 12 months to September – up 75 pc from the year before, according to Washington.

'I'm sure this time I'm going to pass the interview because I've prayed so much. I hope he'll grant me that miracle this time'

Elena Perez
Cuban citizen, 83

The interests section has also been the scene of bitter hostility between the two countries.

The imposing six-storey glass-and-concrete building was the American embassy until the US cut ties with the island two years after the revolution.

Reopened as an interests section in 1977, it is guarded by Cuban police officers and officially sits on Swiss diplomatic territory.

Known as "SINA" in Cuba – its Spanish acronym – it looks out over the famous Malecon, Havana's seaside boulevard, toward Florida.

The esplanade in front bears a sprawling Fidel Castro quote: "Fatherland or death, we shall overcome!"

This was the site where Cubans staged angry protests in 1999 and 2000 demanding the return of Elian Gonzalez, the five-year-old boy who sparked an international custody battle when he was plucked from an inner tube off the Florida coast after his mother died trying to bring him to the United States.

The United States has used the building to stage protests of its own, placing a sparkling "75" – in reference to the 75 Cuban dissidents arrested the year before – at the centre of its Christmas decorations in 2004.

The Cubans responded by installing an enormous poster out front with pictures of the abuses committed by US soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

And in 2006, when the United States posted political messages on a giant display screen, Fidel responded by hoisting 138 black flags to block them.

– AFP

Cubans queue near the US Interest Office in Havana to apply for visas, on December 22, 2014. Photo: AFP

GENEVA

WHO gets green light to deliver aid to rebel-held territory in Syria

DAMASCUS has agreed to allow deliveries of desperately needed medical supplies to opposition-held parts of Aleppo and two other hard-to-reach areas, the World Health Organization said on December 22.

"We have gotten all of the approval letters, we are ready to deliver," the UN agency's Syria representative Elizabeth Hoff told AFP.

While stressing the deliveries would still depend on the security situation, she described the approvals as "a big step forward".

The Syrian government and other parties to the conflict had agreed to allow and facilitate deliveries of medicine for chronic diseases, vaccines, intravenous fluids and surgical supplies to opposition-controlled areas in Aleppo governorate, the besieged Damascus district of Muadamiya, and the flashpoint Eastern Ghouta region near the capital.

Deliveries would likely first be made to opposition-controlled areas in Aleppo governorate, Hoff said.

She said she was "very optimistic" that a convoy of several trucks would bring the goods into Aleppo by next week, and that deliveries to the two other areas could happen within a couple of weeks.

Deliveries had picked up to Aleppo after the UN Security Council in July adopted a resolution allowing UN convoys to cross Syrian borders to deliver desperately needed aid, but since September only a few small shipments had gotten through, Ms Hoff said.

Muadamiya has received just one delivery of medical supplies in the past two years, she said.

The health situation across war-ravaged Syria is critical and deteriorating and is particularly dire in areas largely isolated from aid, Ms Hoff said.

An estimated 4.7 million Syrians are living in hard-to-reach areas, including 241,000 in places besieged by the government or opposition groups, according to UN estimates.

MILLION

4.7

Number of Syrians living in contested/ isolated part of the country.

Ms Hoff pointed to rising numbers of measles cases as vaccination coverage across the country has slumped from 90 percent before the conflict began in March 2011 to 52 pc.

And she said waterborne diseases were continuing to spread even in winter, serving as testimony of horrendous sanitation and hygiene situations.

"In some shelters for displaced people, 50 to 70 people share a single toilet," she said.

More than 200,000 people have been killed in Syria since the civil war began, and around half the population has been forced to flee.

– AFP

JAKARTA

Jakarta bets on web to boost its fortunes

THE Indonesian capital, a chaotic metropolis with shaky internet access, is hoping to turn its fortunes around with an ambitious new online platform that allows residents to report problems, from crime to traffic jams, with their smartphones.

A concrete jungle with a population of about 10 million, Jakarta is infamous for monster traffic snarl-ups, rubbish-strewn, potholed roads, heavy pollution and flooding that engulfs poor slum areas every year.

After successive leaders failed to get to grips with the myriad problems, new governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama is seeking to harness technology and tap into residents' love of social media in the hope of driving through real change, but the initiative has its share of sceptics, not least amongst the city's luddite officials.

Launched earlier this month, the Smart City plan gives people a platform to report problems such as floods, rubbish left lying in the street, potholes and crime, with the idea that nearby officials should then quickly respond.

"We hope people will be active in reporting. If you want to be served well, then help us monitor the city," the governor, who has 2 million Twitter followers, said at the launch of the project.

The initiative's main website, smartcity.jakarta.go.id, uses Google Maps and is integrated with app Waze, owned by Google, which allows drivers to share real-time traffic information.

The site also links up to two smartphone apps that have been specially designed for the project. The first, Qlue, is for residents to report problems, while the second, CROP, allows officials nearby to respond. When a problem is reported, a red marker appears on the main site and when it is resolved, the marker turns green.

Mr Purnama, famed for fiercely reprimanding bumbling officials, hopes the initiative will speed up a bureaucracy criticised as bloated, ineffective and crippled by corruption.

The governor, known by his nickname Ahok, has also ordered the 30,000 neighbourhood chiefs in Jakarta to prove they are doing their jobs by tweeting reports of problems in their area along with a picture, and is threatening to base their pay on how many messages they post.

The internet had already become a popular tool among Jakartans for reporting problems in the city – particularly traffic – but Mr Purnama's is the first comprehensive plan by authorities to use the web to run the metropolis.

> **'In my experience, many in Ahok's administration are not even familiar with email.'**
>
> **Ahmad Safrudin**
> Campaigner

A cyclist checks for the traffic situation through the local's government new web based information facility in Jakarta, Indonesia, on December 19. Photo: AFP

While observers welcomed the initiative, they also expressed serious doubts about whether it would work in a city with patchy internet access and technology-shy officials.

"It is a good idea, but I am not sure it will be effective," Ahmad Safrudin, a campaigner for cleaner air in Jakarta, said.

"In my experience, many in Ahok's administration are not even familiar with email."

Suhono Harso Supangkat, an IT professor from Bandung Institute of Technology, pointed out there were still some black spots in the capital where it is hard to get online.

Internet penetration in Indonesia remains relatively low, with fixed broadband reaching below 5 percent of the population, although more people are logging on via smartphones, particularly in big cities.

But the biggest downfall of the initiative, critics point out, may be the failure of city officials to get to grips with the technology.

A district head, Fidiyah Rohim, said that many officials were confused about the system and had not even attempted to use it yet.

"I have neither accessed the website nor downloaded the application," he told the *Jakarta Post* newspaper. – *AFP*

BEIJING

China gets into festive spending spirit

A girl kisses a Santa Claus at the Intercontinental Hotel of Beijing on December 19. Photo: AFP

CHRISTMAS, once banned in China, has exploded in the officially atheist nation in recent years, with marketeers using everything from saxophones and Smurfs to steam trains to get shoppers to open their wallets.

Anyone walking into a shopping mall is welcomed by an orgy of festive cheer: Shop windows are bedecked with plastic Christmas trees, garlands and baubles, while the strains of Jingle Bells fill the air.

On the streets, banners reading "Happy Christmas" adorn schools and hotels, while festive messages are splashed across adverts and the media. In many restaurants, staff wear Santa Claus hats topped with felt reindeer antlers.

Christmas is celebrated widely across Asia, particularly in commercial centres like Japan and Hong Kong, where it has become a major shopping holiday shorn of most religious trappings.

It has particularly gathered momentum in China since 2010, when then-vice president Xi Jinping, now the country's head of state, popped into Father Christmas's cabin during a visit to Finland.

"At shopping malls, Santa has become a promotional tool for pushing Christmas sales and Chinese like to shop," said Sara Jane Ho, founder of a finishing school popular among Beijing's wealthy.

This year she has noted the proliferation of young Father Christmases, his traditional beard and rounded belly replaced by a saxophone.

"Saxophone is seen as a very Western thing, and Santa Claus is seen as a very Western thing, so it's almost natural they go together," said Ms Ho.

In fact in China almost anything seen as Western is used to evoke Christmas: teddy bears, the Seven Dwarves, fairground carousels or even steam trains.

Last year, a shopping mall in Shanxi province featured a giant Father Christmas, the edge of his jacket lifted as if caught by a gust of breeze in emulation of the iconic image of Marilyn Monroe.

This Christmas craze is mainly limited to young urbanites from the middle or upper classes.

"At my home in the country, people don't celebrate Christmas. By contrast, their children who have moved to the city celebrate it: On December 24, they meet with friends and go out to have fun," said Guo Dengxiu, a migrant from eastern Anhui province.

Many Christmas "traditions" have been brought back by young Chinese who have studied abroad, said Ms Ho, meaning the holiday often bears more resemblance to Valentine's Day than the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

"In the West, you have a big meal with your family, just cooked at home, you exchange gifts, and afterward you would attend a Church service," she said.

"In China, you have a big meal at a restaurant, with friends or with your romantic significant other, so it's a romantic date, and it would be followed by going to the cinema, karaoke, clubbing or a costume party."

The commercial importance of Christmas in China is typified in the eastern city of Yiwu, which supplies some 60 percent of the world's decorations, where a dip in international orders has been filled by domestic demand.

But Chinese traditional holidays, such as Lunar new year celebrations, remain more important occasions for families to get together, professor Benoit Vermander from Fudan University in Shanghai said.

He sees China's love of Christmas as "a close mixture between attraction to 'globalised' Western customs and a fascination with religion, which is clearly shown by the popularity of Christianity in the big cities of the East".

"China celebrates both Christmas and the Western new year and, a few weeks later, the Chinese new year. In this way, it has two cultural identities: one reflecting its ancestral culture and the other reflecting globalised culture, borrowing from Christian tradition," Mr Vermander said.

But some in China see the rise of Christmas as stemming more from the weakening of traditional values.

The "Christmas frenzy" represents a "shipwreck" of the Chinese culture, according to a paper written by a group of 10 Chinese PhD students, published by the Taiwan-based Institut Ricci this month. – *AFP*

BREDA

Dutch scientists use smell to recreate famous deaths

DUTCH scientists are recreating the deaths of some of the world's most famous personalities by reconstructing their last moments using scents and sounds.

From the sweet smell of Jacqueline Kennedy's perfume mingled with the scent of John F Kennedy's blood to Whitney Houston's last drug-fuelled moments in a Beverly Hills bathtub, scientists at a Breda university say they offer visitors a unique, if somewhat macabre, historical snapshot.

"We all have seen the images of JFK's assassination, but what did it smell like?" asks Frederik Duerinck, from the communication and multimedia design faculty of Breda's Avans University of Applied Sciences.

To find out, visitors with a sense of the morbid are invited to lie in a series of four silver metal boxes similar to those found in a morgue.

The boxes, which are pitch-dark inside, are rigged with pipes leading to bottles containing pressurised smells.

A soundtrack is played and on queue different scents are released into the box to recreate a specific "final moment".

For around five minutes, visitors can relive the smells and sounds believed to have surrounded four people whose deaths are etched into the world's collective memory: Kennedy (1963); Princess Diana (1997); Moamer Kadhafi (2011) and Whitney Houston (2012).

For instance, those wanting to experience Houston's final moments are transported to a bathtub at the upmarket Beverly Hills hotel where the diva died in February 2012 at age 48.

A coroner ruled that the singing legend died of accidental drowning, with cocaine and heart disease listed as contributing factors.

A visitor is pulled out after testing one of the "Famous Deaths" installations in Breda on November 25. Photo: AFP

To the sounds of splashing water and Houston's voice, a visitor first gets a whiff of generic cleaner, used in hotels around the world, followed by the olive oil the singer used in her tub.

Then a strong chemical odour, similar to that of cocaine, fills the box, grabbing its occupant by the throat, followed by the sound of rushing water and then silence.

"Smell is rarely used in communication and we wanted to explore its uses," said Duerinck. "It's a very powerful means of communication."

Scientists have proved that smells are linked to the part of the brain that regulates emotion and memory.

Odours are often used in the retail industry to trigger a buying mood in customers.

"Who doesn't want to buy a loaf after catching a whiff of fresh bread?" said Duerinck, who together with other lecturers and students has put together an inventory of odours and is devising new ways of using smell: for instance in story-telling.

"It's quite surprising and spectacular," said Riks Soepenberg, 31, who experienced a recreation of Kadhafi's last moments as the former Libyan strongman was hunted and killed by rebels in October 2011.

"You can watch the pictures as many times as you want, it's just not the same thing," he said of the attack on Kadhafi's convoy, forcing the long-serving leader to hide in a drainage pipe before being murdered.

"I almost felt myself being hunted," said Soepenberg.

In the coming months the installation will be taken across Europe.

"We've conducted extensive research," said Wander Eikenboom, another lecturer at Avans about the authenticity of the experience.

"There's already a lot of information available on the internet, such as what perfume Jackie Kennedy or JFK were wearing," said Eikenboom.

"Whitney Houston's autopsy report, for instance, is also available," he added.

But the scientists admit battling to recreate the right scent for Jackie Kennedy's perfume, which is no longer made.

"We had to rebuild something that resembled it as closely as possible," said scientist Mark Meeuwenoord.

The inventors of the "final moments" smells said in any case, exact historical accuracy was not their aim.

Rather, they wanted to explore new ways of "smelling" old stories. – *AFP*

MIAMI

Science boosts tsunami warning

THE 2004 tsunami led to greater global cooperation and improved techniques for detecting waves that could reach faraway shores, scientists have said, even though they still cannot predict when an earthquake will strike.

A decade ago, scientists did not have a tsunami warning system in place in the Indian Ocean, because there had been no recent history of tsunamis there.

The world's main monitoring body, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center headquartered at Hawaii's Ewa Beach, was focused on volatile areas prone to earthquakes along the Pacific Ring of Fire, including Japan and South America.

"We weren't on the proper footing to be able to quickly respond to an event of the size that it was," Mike Angove, tsunami program branch director at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said.

After the disaster, US tsunami experts began monitoring the Indian Ocean while the international community established a new system that was eventually implemented last year.

Australia, Indonesia and India have now taken charge of a monitoring body known as the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System.

The United States nearly doubled its staff at the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center from eight to 15, and its tsunami warning centers in Hawaii and Alaska continue to be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"The scientific community of tsunami scientists has exploded since 2004," Eddie Bernard, scientist emeritus at NOAA, told a meeting of the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco last week.

"There were probably 100 scientists in the world before 2004. Now there are at least 1000," he said.

"There is a whole generation of scientists now that are dedicated to this problem."

While scientists still cannot say when the big earthquakes that cause tsunamis will strike, leaving coastal populations just minutes to flee to high ground, what they can do now is better predict the waves that spread to faraway shores, Mr Angove said.

"We have made incredible progress there, in terms of being able to identify those waves as they are moving out across the deep ocean, model them and turn those into meaningful forecasts for those distant shores, and that could be as short as an hour away."

Scientists can measure these waves with the help of buoys known as Deep-Ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunami (DART).

Each unit has a pressure gauge on the seafloor that detects tsunami activity and send information by acoustic modem to the buoy. The buoy then sends the data by satellite to the US tsunami warning centers.

"In 2004 there were six buoys out. In 2014 there are 60," Mr Bernard said.

He added that a total of nine countries now participate in the DART system. Many are hopeful that technology will continue to improve.

Last year, NOAA – which spends about US$25 million per year on tsunami operations – implemented a new tsunami flooding forecast system, so that the team can project how the water will act when it gets there and how much flooding is likely.

"If the same Indian Ocean tsunami were to occur today, we believe we might still lose many, but it would be on the order of tens of thousands of people as compared to 240,000," said Vasily Titov, director of NOAA's Center for Tsunami Research in Seattle. – *AFP*

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Business *Can* be simple

KUALA LUMPUR

Civil engineer Kevin Lim (right) works out at a fitness centre in Kuala Lumpur. Photo: AFP

Malaysia's foodies face growing obesity problem

MALAYSIAN'S have a passionate love affair with their lip-smacking cuisine: rich curries, succulent fried chicken, buttery breads and creamy drinks, but it is increasingly an unhealthy relationship.

Malaysia is Southeast Asia's fattest country, where a nationwide foodie culture is feeding mounting concern over what its health minister calls "an obesity epidemic".

"We are the most obese nation in Southeast Asia, and Malaysians are becoming more and more obese," Health Minister S Subramaniam said, warning of a "crisis in unhealthy behaviour".

Nearly 45 percent of Malaysian men and almost half of women are overweight or obese, according to a 2013 study by UK medical journal *Lancet*, compared to global rates of around 30 percent.

A recent report by consultants McKinsey Global Institution found obesity now costs the global economy US$2 trillion in healthcare and lost productivity, or 2.8 percent of global GDP, just $100 billion less than both smoking and armed conflict. The study warned almost half of the world's adult population will be overweight or obese by 2030 and called for a "coordinated response" from governments, retailers, and food and drink manufacturers.

In Malaysia, childhood obesity rates also are climbing, from less than 10 percent a decade ago to nearly 14 percent in 2008, according to the most recent figures, saddling health systems with a new generation of diabetes, hypertension and other obesity-related illnesses.

Already, some 2.6 million adults have diabetes, a figure authorities expect to spike to 4.5 million in 2020. Malaysia has a population of around 29 million.

Civil engineer Kevin Lim is trying to slim down after doctors told him a few years ago that his life was at risk.

Mr Lim, 40, who weighs 173 kilograms (380 pounds), has diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension and joint pains from lugging his bulk around.

"All I knew was that eating made me happy. I was a couch potato, watching DVDs, and my weight rose," Mr Lim said as he huffs through his now-regular workouts in a Kuala Lumpur fitness centre.

Malaysia is a victim of its own success, with decades of economic advancement bringing the flip-side health issues that developing countries often encounter when hunger is defeated, incomes rise and lifestyles become more sedentary.

But a key factor is the national love for Malaysia's delicious but rich fare: spicy curries made with fattening coconut milk, carb-heavy rice dishes, and sugary drinks like *teh tarik* – a frothy tea with sweetened condensed milk.

'All I knew was eating was making me happy. I was a couch potato ... and my weight rose.'

Kevin Lim
Civil engineer

The breaking of bread is of vital social and cultural importance in each of multi-racial Malaysia's main ethnic groups – Muslim Malays, Chinese, and Hindu Indians – and is enthusiastically embraced.

Open-air food stalls are a fixture in every neighbourhood, often open 24 hours and full of late-diners – a major health no-no, according to doctors.

Fast food giants McDonald's and KFC also do a roaring business, and Malaysians are among the world's top per-capita sugar consumers.

Compounding the issue, languid, tropical Malaysia has historically lacked a strong tradition of active outdoor leisure pursuits, due in part to the sweltering weather, Islamic modesty and shortage of public spaces for exercise.

Mr Subramaniam, the health minister, said the problem eventually "will affect productivity and impact our economic development".

Over the past year, the government has ramped up public-awareness campaigns and mass street-exercise activities. Subsidies that kept prices of sugar and cooking oil low have been reduced in recent years, for joint budgetary and health reasons.

Fitness chains, a relatively undeveloped industry in Malaysia, now report growing numbers of health-conscious members.

"At least three out of 10 people who sign up at our gym do it because of illnesses including obesity and heart-related illness," said Elaine Yap, marketing manager with fitness chain Jatomi, which has four outlets.

Mohamad Ismail Noor, president of the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity, backs emerging calls to ban 24-hour food outlets, cut sugar content in beverages, further reduce sugar and cooking oil subsidies, and build more parks.

"We need to take stern action. The government has to put its foot down and say 24-hour outlets are not healthy. Obesity is the mother of all diseases," he said.

A study of nearly 1700 seriously ill diabetics released last week found that more than three out of four shrugged off doctor's advice on changing their lifestyles, Malaysian media reported.

The study also reportedly found that diabetes-related eye complications in such patients increased from 35 percent in 2008 to 49 pc in 2013, while kidney complications rose six percentage points to 42 pct.

Wong Siew Hong, a 170-kg diabetic automotive mechanic, is trying.

Barely able to bend down to pick up his tools, he is trying a range of weight-loss products but can't kick his love of oily Malaysian noodle dishes and is ready to throw in the towel.

"When I walk, I feel like I am a tank. I am just too heavy," said the father of two.

"At home I just eat and sit on the sofa." – *AFP*

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the pulse

Lost Angels show their mettle

Myanmar's death-metal underground is finding its place among the country's armies of K-pop fans

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IT'S not easy being a metal band in Myanmar.

The greatest struggle facing the country's young rockers is not, however, maintaining a cool, rebellious, unconventional image in a conservative society famed for its traditional way of life.

Nor is it finding a musical following amid the armies of K-pop and hip-hop fans. Instead, it is a struggle for power.

Electrical power, that is.

At a concert held earlier this month to promote the new *Lost Angel Leads* album – a collaboration of four of the biggest names of the Myanmar's death-metal underground – bands were left in the quiet when the electrical system cut out twice during their performances.

The event, on December 7, was the largest death-metal concert ever held in Myanmar, and the four bands performing – Last Day of Beethoven, Darkest Tear from My Heart, A Letter from Caesar and Suicide Plan – went to great lengths to ensure their fans got a true headbanging experience.

"In the past, the electricity always cut out during metal concerts, so for this promotional concert we spent more money and rented really good systems and a technician," said Moe Lone, lead vocalist of Darkest Tears from My Heart.

"The people who run the concert venue at Kandawgyi Park could have supplied us with more electrical voltage but they didn't. Metal music uses high voltages of electricity but they didn't give us enough so the music blew the system," said Ko Phone Gyi, guitarist from A Letter from Caesar.

Even when the power came back on, the sound system was poor and vocalists struggled to make themselves heard over the crowds.

"I heard some people in the audience yelling at us and I'm really sorry about that," said Soe Pyae Han, lead vocalist of A Letter from Caesar. "But even though the opening of the show sucked, the audience was rocking with us the whole time. We're really grateful to our fans – they keep us strong."

The *Lost Angel Leads* album, released on November 22, is something of a milestone for the underground metal scene in Myanmar. Featuring 12 tracks, three by each of the four bands, it has been a long time in the making. The bands started recording in 2013 and the album was slated for release within a year but has taken over a year and a half to complete.

"We had big problems finding time when all the band members were free," said Bhone Gyi of A Letter From Caesar.

"But we're so glad now it's released. Now, if someone asked for an album that represents Myanmar metal music, we have one."

Amid an influx of pop music from Korea and the West, and the increasing popularity of local hip-hop music, the underground metal scene has come into its own in Myanmar in recent years. After living with censorship for 60 years, many young people are now forming bands and expressing their opinions through music, and the popularity of alternative music is growing.

"We started in 2007, but people weren't as accepting of metal music then as they are now," said Moe Lone, lead vocalist in Darkest Tears from My Heart.

"This is the time of metal music in Myanmar," he said. "We thought metal fans were just from Yangon and Mandalay but actually we were wrong. The internet may still be slow but people can search for anything they want now. So there are metal fans in Taunggyi, Monywa and other cities around the country who ordered the *Lost Angel Leads* album by phone."

"The metal family is wider than we knew. Our struggle was not wasted. We're not going to change – we're going to keep standing up for Myanmar metal music," he said.

For metal band Last Day of Beethoven, who formed more than seven years ago, the collaboration is their first official album release. In 2007, they released a similar compilation CD, along with Darkest Tears From My Heart and three other bands, which was distributed for free. Fast-forward 7 years, and *Lost Angel Leads,* created with the help of an expert producer, has made it to the bestseller lists.

"During the past 7 years, we've been writing new songs and practising, but we rarely got the chance to perform at metal concerts and we didn't have a producer. Now we have a producer and he asked us to do this group album. This is the big chance for us," said band member Phoe Zaw.

"After the album had been produced, we couldn't believe that they were are our songs because the mixing and re-mastering was really cool," said Suicide Plan guitarist Nay Soe Myat.

But being part of the underground music scene in Myanmar comes with its challenges. Nay Soe Myat says his parents aren't supportive of his music.

"When we started the band my parents didn't like the music so I wanted to give up. But I got through that difficult time and now my parents don't try to stop me from making this music, although they don't support it. Anyhow, we never give up on our music and we always try to get better," he said.

The band says the number of metal fans in Myanmar is increasing every day, and they see a bright future for metal music.

"Nowadays young people understand music and audiences are more critical – they know what music is great and what is not," said vocalist Lone Lone.

The *Lost Angel Leads* album is currently in seventh place on Shwe FM's bestseller list and one of the songs on the album, Last Day of Beethoven's "Disaster Around You", was named Myanmar's release of the year by the online music portal Global Metal Apocalypse.

But the bands are not resting on their laurels.

"Now that we have more fans who know about us, we have to try even harder. This is the time for improving the Myanmar metal scene," said Phoe Zaw.

"It has been a struggle, but we can't stop now," agreed A Letter from Caesar's Soe Pyae Han.

"We will be metal until the end."

Photos: Supplied/Arkar Production

CONGRATULATIONS

We would like to congratulate on **the Patron of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) and the Chairman of the Kanbawza Bank Limited, U Aung Ko Win,**

who has served the highest Income Tax at the first place among all higher national tax payers nation-wide in Myanmar once again for the Assessment Year of 2013-2014, as per official announcement of the Internal Revenue Department, the Ministry of Finance, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Yangon dated 22.12. 2014.

We wish that you continue to be the highest tax payer in Myanmar for the upcoming years and contribute toward the betterment of society and development of the country.

Chairman and Central Working Committee/Working Committee
The Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI)

ANNUAL PREDICTIONS 2015

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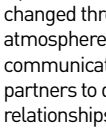
AQUARIUS | Jan 20 – Feb 18

You may begin by adopting a constructive and determined approach to the New Year but be wary of creeping inertia toward the end of the year. In determining whom to trust, be aware of the value of keeping your options open until you can be certain. Social life will improve after July, as communications with those around you improve and you make it a point to strive for deeper harmony in relations with others. Your greatest asset this year will be time management, but remember that the only genuinely time-critical project is life. Romantic overtures will not be easy or smooth, but avoid settling for second-best. In October, a wonderful event will bring you renewed confidence in seeking love. Keep your self-respect and maintain your spiritual health.

PISCES | Feb 19 – March 20



For this coming year, develop your instinct to inspire others, as well as the flexibility to receive inspiration in turn. Adopting the correct mindset will help you understand the difference between self-promotion and selfless promotion. Take comfort from the knowledge that you can make a significant contribution without constant external motivation. Emotional affairs will flourish on a foundation of trust until July, but thereafter social relationships may be clouded and uneasy. Take the time to recognise which relationships are most important to you, and ensure your energy is spent on cultivating them. Apply a passionate consistency to your efforts, particularly toward the end of the year when your enthusiasm may start to wane. Listen more. Speak less. Think deeply.

ARIES | Mar 21 – Apr 19

At this point in your journey through life you may pause to enjoy the view, of accomplishments past and prospects yet to come. This is not to rest on your laurels, because you already know that every human being is called upon to shine, but rather to count your gifts and orient yourself toward the responsibilities of the larger challenge that awaits. You will sometimes require mental discipline to restrain your more emotional desires. Try to show restraint when necessary and manage your natural tendency to speak before considering the impact of your words. June will be the great turning point. After that, life will move with ease and harmony. In matters of love, you will feel more positive around April, when you bring the past to a close and look to the future with a fresh mind.

TAURUS | Apr 20 – May 20

Social interactions this year will benefit from self-reflection of your mental stance, as you come to realise that those around you can assist you on your path to self-improvement. Maintaining positive relationships will depend on the effective deployment of your sympathetic nature. You may anticipate alterations in your lifestyle after June, perhaps significantly so. You are aware that integrity consists in who you are as much as what you do, and as a person of integrity, you have nothing to hide and nothing to fear. Minds are changed through observation, not argument. Take time to construct an atmosphere that will encourage others to embrace change. Keep communication channels open and provide opportunities for your potential partners to discuss how to make that change better. Long-term trust in relationships and in love may become clouded around November.

GEMINI | May 21 – June 20

It's time to unlock the power of your imagination and to liberate your mind. Those around you may be progressing in leaps and bounds but, instead of feeling left behind, recognise that you too have opportunities to make great changes if you open yourself to the possibility. Avoid giving others the impression that you know all the answers. Indeed, you are still thinking through the thorny thicket of your problems. Your resolve to make 2015 a defining point in your journey through life will be tested around May time, but view adversity as a challenge to be overcome. A new phase of your love life, even the prospect of marriage, will bring comfort and peace of mind later in the year.

CANCER | June 21 – July 22

Change will come amid the clouds and rains of July as you come to realise your potential to achieve things far beyond your dreams. But take heed. A right decision at the wrong time is to be shunned. The rightness of the time is determined not by you, but by the interest of others who pay enthusiastic attention to your actions. As your new direction moves into clear view mid-year, challenges will also emerge. Abandon the view that change must be either revolutionary or evolutionary. Significant results depend on honing your mind to eager innovation and breeding a confidence that laughs at risks. Take care not to repeat past mistakes in matters of love.

LEO | July 23 – Aug 22

Your greatest asset this year will be an outlook on life that is both sympathetic and enthusiastic. Balance this with the insight that one of your most glaring faults is a certain tendency to overstate. Wisdom lies in accepting enough informed criticism to change your course, lest you attract harsher calumny. Your powers were given to you not to advance your own purposes to excess, or to make a big show and blazon your name, but to serve others. Accept accountability. Embrace responsibility. Plato said, "The unexamined life is not worth living," and perhaps you know by now exactly what he meant. The day you stop making excuses is the first day of your ascent to new heights.

VIRGO | Aug 23 – Sept 22

It's best to keep things simple as you embark on the coming year. Strive for clarity of mind, and eschew superstition, as this will help avert misunderstandings and upsets of various kinds. Though you try to do your best, sometimes it's enough merely to do what is required. Consider that the power to influence others is a thing of beauty and the capacity to inspire is the mark of a well-developed spirit. Communications blockages will disturb your mental balance and complicate your decision-making unless firmly addressed. You should consult with a mentor to learn how to stage and manage your professional games. Wonderful social opportunities will surprise you, posing a challenge to be overcome.

LIBRA | Sept 23 – Oct 22

This year, establishing good and solid personal relationships is very important. Listen twice as much as you speak, and show commensurate interest in what others have to say to you. Heavy responsibilities are coming, and will challenge your gifts of time management and social organisation. But be confident that you can excel. Unearth your talents and polish them to genius, for self-awareness may be one of the most important of all your personal leadership skills. Your power to build an emotional relationship lies in the beauty and sweetness of your manner and your ability to see the best in others. You will face incredible difficulties toward the end of the year, but try to view them as an opportunity to learn, appreciate and grow.

SCORPIO | Oct 23 – Nov 21

Your tendency to remain stuck in the year that has passed will prevent you from achieving your potential this year if you do not adopt a positive mental attitude. Envy and jealousy wither in a climate of mental purity. Try to become an inspirational human being by lighting a candle in the darkest haven of your heart. Do good and leave behind the fragrance of virtue that the storm of time can never dissipate. Know that to be good is to be wise. Make yourself a valued partner in business. Look for the light that shines on the direction you should take toward prosperity and spiritual fulfilment. Find an experienced person to guide you, and seek the support of others in carrying through your plans.

SAGITTARIUS | Nov 22 – Dec 21

Your leadership skills will determine the level of your success. A penchant for freedom can lead to difficulty as well as delight, but unconventional behaviour may from time to time embarrass even you. Never forget that knowing what you want entails knowing what you must give up before you get it. July will bring the start of good fortune, but reflect on this. The wrong decision at the wrong time is disaster, the wrong decision at the right time is error, the right decision at the wrong time is mishap, but the right decision at the right time is golden. A romantic relationship may become turbulent around mid-year. Be wary of expending your energy on pursuing unrealistic outcomes.

CAPRICORN | Dec 22 – Jan 19

Self-confidence must be nurtured to make your mind strong and healthy. Be reliant on yourself, but seek ways to delegate responsibility where this lies in your interest, and avoid answering directly for any action not your own. It is true that quality is remembered long after price is forgotten, and material possessions don't bring lasting happiness. Accept fewer social invitations, limit many of your activities and spend more time on reflection. Expel from your life all that needs to be eliminated and you will feel lighter and happier. Until the end of July, your emotional world will be in favourable mode. After that, expect a measure of risk in personal relationships. Strike a delicate balance between loving others and loving yourself.

Myanmar film industry objects to new censorship rules

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FILM professionals are warning that new rules governing their industry could lead to a return to military-era censorship. The directives, drawn up by the government's Public Service Capacity Assessment Team, came into force on December 1.

U Win Kyi, vice-director general of the assessment team, says the purpose of the new rules is to provide entertainment to audiences without "giving the wrong message".

"We don't mean to restrict directors, actors or production companies. Our focus is on providing quality movies to the public," he said.

He added that the rules were being introduced because the quality of movies had deteriorated since the abolition of censorship, referring to the increasing number of movies featuring sex scenes or without a main plot.

'We want the freedom to create our movies'

Kyi Phyu Shin

Questions relating to editorial or artistic freedom are still highly sensitive in Myanmar, as the often harsh enforcement of the censorship imposed by the former military regime led to comedians and other artistes being jailed for expressing their views.

A censorship board comprising former board members and Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation (MMPO) representatives was constituted on December 1 with participation from production companies.

Film director Kyi Phyu Shin said she feared that though the board had announced it would restrict sex scenes, the handling of political issues could also be restricted.

"We can't accept that movies need to be controlled by censorship as they were before," she said, adding that such restrictions would be particularly unwelcome as print and other media enjoyed greater freedom.

"We want the freedom to create our movies," she said, calling for a discussion of the question between censors and "respected and professional directors" of the MMPO. "They can explain the point of view of film makers in any discussion of which scenes should be cut," she said.

MMPO chair Lu Min, an actor and director, told *The Myanmar Times* he could not accept the re-imposition of military-era restrictions.

"I raised this with Information Minister U Ye Htut, who said this move was directed only against bad films. But people hate the idea of the return of censorship, and I'm against it," he said.

Aye Kyu Lay, vice-chair of the MMPO, confirmed that the restrictions had come into force as of December 1 for films, videos and karaoke VCDs.

In its announcement of the new regulations, the assessment team said that the rules would ban scenes and language "unsuitable for family viewing": plots and language that might tend to lead young people astray, discrimination against religion or scenes likely to incite on the grounds of religion, dress inconsistent with Myanmar traditional culture, films without a main plot, unedited films and "non-quality" films.

What's on

DECEMBER 29 - JANUARY 4

Got an event?
List it in What's On!
whatsonmt@gmail.com

ART

Dec 15 - Jan 15 "The Final Exhibit". Featuring more than 100 paintings and illustrations by 21 Myanmar artists across different mediums (oil, acrylics and water-colours). Gallery 65, 65 Yaw Min Gyi Road 10am-6pm

FILM

Start times at Mingalar (1, 2), Top Royal, Shae Shaung (1,2) and Nay Pyi Taw cinemas are 10am, noon, 2pm, 4pm, 6pm and 8pm.
Start times at Junction Square and Maw Tin are 10am, 1pm and 4pm daily and 7pm and 9:30pm on Friday and Saturday.
Start times at Mingalar San Pya are 10am, 12:30pm, 3:30pm, 6:30pm and 9:30pm.

Nay Pyi Taw Cinema, near Sule Pagoda
Exodus: Gods and King. Directed by Ridlely Scott. Biblical epic.
Penguins of Madagascar. Directed by Simon J. Smith and Erin Darnell. 3D computer animated, science-fiction comedy.
Rise of the Legend. Directed by Chow Hin Yeung Roy. Hong Kong-Chinese martial arts film.
Mingalar Cinema 1, Thein Gyi Zay, Latha
Pyramid. Director Grégory Levasseur. American supernatural horror.
Mingalar Cinema 2, Dagon Center 2, Myaynigone
Exodus: Gods and King.
Shae Shaung Cinema, Sule Pagoda Road, Kyauktada
Pyramid.
O T Ghost Overtime. Directed by Isara Nadee. Thai horror thriller.
Junction Square Cineplex, Kamaryut
Interstellar. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Science-fiction film starring by Matthew McConaughey.
The Hobbit. Directed by Peter Jackson. Epic fantasy adventure film with 3D screening.
Junction Mawtin, Lanmadaw
Interstellar.
Mingalar San Pya Cineplex, Phone Gyi Street and Anawrahta, Lanmadaw
Pyramid.
O T Ghost Overtime.

MUSIC

Dec 29 Monday Blues. Mojo Bar, 135 Inya Road, Bahan 9:30pm-11:30pm
Dec 31 New Year's Eve Blue Glow Party. 5-course Western set dinner (US$120 per person) featuring live entertainment by DJ-TXU, Chan Chan, May Khalar, Bunny Phyo and others. Sedona Hotel, 1 Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Yankin (in front of Maha Mya Kyun Thar Garden) 7pm
Dec 31 New Year Live Music. Welcoming 2015 in a thrilling and grand celebration, complete with delicious cuisine, live entertainment, lucky draws and free flow house sprits and soft drinks. Special performances by Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein and J Maung Maung. Park Royal Hotel, 33 Alan Pya Pagoda Street 7pm (RSVP – 01 250 388)
Dec 31 A Night Life into the Wild-Night Safari. Free flow of beer, house wine and special cocktails, interactive live cooking stations and buffets, spectacular dance performances, magical performances, and a New Year countdown. Dress code: safari/jungle theme. Entry US$160 per person. Sule Shangri-La Hotel, 223 Sule Pagoda Road, Dagon 7pm-1am
Dec 31 Black Gold New Year's Eve Party. Entertainment including music, games, lucky draws and a best costume award for those dressed in the black and gold theme. Includes buffet dinner. Shwe Shan Kan Restaurant, Inya Kan Baung, Inya Road. For tickets call 095258036/095670093. K25,000 per person. 7pm
Dec 31 New Year Party at 50th Street Bar, 9-13 50th St, Botautaung 9pm
Dec 31 2014 Countdown. Celebrate the closing of 2014 with international DJs, party favours and lots of booze. Union Bar, 42 Strand Road (same building as Red Cross) 7pm to late
Dec 31 Gold New Year's Eve. K15,000 entry with one drink included. Dress Code: Gold, silver and diamond. Mojo Bar, 35, Inya Rd, Bahan 10pm
Dec 31 Let's Toast to a Sparkling New Year. Escape Gastro Bar, 31D Kan Yeikthar Street 8pm
Dec 31 New Year's Eve Party Broadway. International buffet dinner with free flow wine, beer and soft drinks. Special performances by Chit Kaung, Htun Eaindra Bo and others. Chatrium Hotel (Ngapali Pool Garden), 40 Natmauk Rd, Tarmwe 7pm
Dec 31 Happy New Year's Eve foam party. Sai Sai, Snare, Nine One, Jouk Jack and others will perform. Tickets (K7500) available at Bo Bo Music Production, City Mart & Ocean Supermarket, Orange Supermarket, Nobody, Fashion Star, Run YGN, Genius and by calling 09 5108634. Myaw Zin Kyun-Nat Mauk Rd 5pm

food

A tropical **New Year treat**

COCONUT SAUCE

Add 2 tablespoons of sugar to the remaining coconut cream and boil in a sauce pan on a low heat. Add a couple of pinches of salt. When the sugar dissolves, simmer for 2-3 minutes. Serve warm poured over your crêpes.

GINGER SAUCE

- 3 teaspoons finely grated ginger
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 cup water

Add all of the ingredients to a saucepan and cook on a low heat. Add a couple of pinches of salt. When the sugar dissolves, simmer for 6-7 minutes. Serve warm with your crêpes.

PHYO ARBIDANS
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WE love eating crêpes for breakfast in my family, especially on Sunday mornings. They're easy to make without any hassle in the kitchen. I'm always trying to think up creative new recipes to keep weekend breakfasts exciting, and this week I've been experimenting with my favourite Asian flavour: coconut.

This very easy and yummy crepe recipe would make a great New Year's Day breakfast. I have shared recipes for crêpes before but this one has an Asian tropical twist with the addition of coconut cream. Make sure you use tinned coconut cream or milk – fresh coconut milk is great but it's a bit watery. I couldn't find coconut milk so I used cream for this recipe and added a little milk to make the mixture thinner.

I've also created two delicious sauces to serve your crêpes with. They're different from traditional crêpe sauces but you won't be disappointed!

COCONUT CRÊPES WITH BANANA AND COCONUT SAUCE
5 servings

- 150g plain flour
- 1 ⅓ cup coconut cream (I have used a 400ml tin of Chaokoh)
- 2 eggs
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup milk
- ½ teaspoon vegetable oil

Add the plain flour to a deep mixing bowl and make a little well in the middle. Pour half of the milk and coconut milk into the well, and mix the flour and milk to make a smooth paste. Next, add the eggs to the mixture and stir slowly to combine well (be careful not to whisk the mixture). Add the remaining half of the milk and coconut milk along with the salt and stir again, making sure there are no lumps in the paste. Finally, add the vegetable oil and mix well.

Cover the bowl with cellophane wrap and keep in the fridge for 30-60 minutes.

Before making the crêpes, take the mixing bowl out of fridge and bring the mixture back to room temperature.

Heat a non-stick fry pan (a 28cm pan will make 5 crepes) on a high heat for few seconds before turning the heat down to medium. Stir the crepe mixture and pour half a cup of the mixture into the pan.

Holding the pan, allow the mixture to cover the base of the pan. Cook for nearly 2 minutes on a medium heat before flipping (you can try to flip it using the pan but it's easier to use a spatula!) and cooking on the other side for around one minute. Transfer the crepe onto a plate and repeat the process with the rest of the mixture.

The pan needs to be hot enough to cook the crêpes but not so hot that you burn the mixture.

Serve the crêpes with fresh banana and fruit, and pour the coconut sauce and ginger sauce over the top.

Yangon speakeasy not quite the bee's knees

Restaurant Review

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ORIGINALLY places for illegal boozing during the Prohibition era of 1920s America, speakeasies have taken on a mythical status of late, with a new wave of speakeasy-inspired bars and restaurants bringing the glamour of the 1920s to 21st-century hipsters around the world. As the 'retro-cool' novelty dwindles, it's a trend that is starting to look a little naff. Unless, of course, you live in Yangon, where it's light-years ahead of its time.

The Blind Tiger – the first venue to bring speakeasy-chic to Yangon – is a surprisingly edgy yet unpretentious addition to the Yangon restaurant scene. Tucked away at the back of a scruffy condominium building on Nawaday street, the restaurant is difficult to find, although its seemingly "secret" location only adds to its charm when you finally discover it – thanks to the help of some amused locals who seem to know exactly what you're looking for.

By Yangon standards, The Blind Tiger is decidedly hip. Right from the moment you knock on the huge wooden door and are surveyed through the speakeasy-flap before being let in, you can't help but be won over by the novelty of the place. The devil, as they say, is in the detail, and with other quirky touches such as a toilet soundtrack of prohibition lectures and old swing music, this new arrival has all the hallmarks of a trendy bar du jour.

As our party took our seats in the dimly-lit, boudoir-esque loft area, things were looking promising. You can't do vintage-chic without a cocktail in hand and, fortunately, The Blind Tiger has a tempting list of bespoke libations on offer. My guest ordered a chilli infused "Spiked Tiger" (K7000) while I went for a Spiked Ginger Mojito (K7000) – an old classic with a ginger twist. Both were beyond excellent. When it comes to cocktails, these guys know their stuff.

A shame then, that the food failed to excite. I ordered the Blind Tiger Burger (K15,000) with a blue cheese topping (the lengthy list of cheese and salsa options only served to increase my already high expectations). One of my guests chose the Myanmar beer infused fish and chips (K16,000), while my vegetarian, tapas-loving friend excitedly ordered the tortilla espanola (K6000).

The food was, for want of a better word, good. The tortilla was tasty though uninspiring (my guest only ordered one tapas dish as a snack but, as is usual with tapas, you'd need to order several dishes between you for a satisfying meal). The burger itself was succulent and perfectly cooked, although it was let down – as is often the case in Myanmar – by the inedible bun. The fish was flakey and melt-in-your-mouth, although the Myanmar beer batter wasn't crispy. The rough-cut garlic and sea-salt chips were also good. At these prices though, one might be forgiven for expecting something more than just "good." There are certainly better burgers to be found in Yangon for less than $15.

The initial euphoria we'd felt upon finding the place quickly subsided as we finished our meals and were left with the slightly uneasy feeling that we'd been robbed blind. Having said that, as the first of its kind in Yangon this place scores high on novelty points – definitely one to check out, but perhaps just to sample their exceptional cocktails after filling up at one of the numerous, better value eateries on Nawaday street.

Photo: Charlotte Rose

The Blind Tiger

103 United Condominium, corner of Nawaday Street and Alan Pya Pagoda Rd, Dagon township, Yangon

Restaurant Rating
★★★☆☆

Food	7
Service	7
Beverage	9
Value for Money	5
X-Factor	6

Nobel festival seeks to revive Myanmar literature

ZON PANN PWINT
zonpann08@gmail.com

A LITERARY festival, celebrating books written by Nobel laureates over the past century, is to be held in Yangon from January 17 to 19 at the city's National Theatre.

The Nobel-Myanmar Literary Festival will exhibit original works by authors who were awarded the Nobel Prize in literature between 1901 and 2014, including Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ernest Hemingway, Albert Camus, Rabindranath Tagore and Rudyard Kipling. Myanmar translations of some of the books will also be on sale.

"The aim is to revive Myanmar literature by introducing the finest works by Nobel laureates. In previous years, there has been a fall in the creativity and originality of local writers because there has been hardly any fine literature published," said U Pe Myint, writer and chair of the committee organising the festival.

"I want to awaken sleepy Myanmar literature. I believe seeing the finest works by award-winning authors will help to give local authors new inspiration and inspire them to write," he said.

"The festival is also intended to fire up reader's enthusiasm for literature and broaden their minds."

The theme of the festival is "Literature for Peace". One of the highlights will be a performance of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, a play by Molière which premiered in 1670. The play has been adapted by Myanmar writer Zaw Gyi with the new title *Mahar San Chin Thu* to suit local tastes and will be performed by writers, cartoonists and singers at the three-day event.

Since the post-war years, bestsellers, classics and prize-winning books by famous authors from abroad have been translated into Myanmar language. Notable translators include writers such as Shwe U Daung (1889-1973), who translated such novels as *Great Expectations*, *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and writer Mya Than Tint (1929-1998) who translated *War and Peace* and *Gone With the Wind*. A number of writers have compiled short stories by Nobel Laureates and translated them into Myanmar, including Sayar Zaw Gyi (1907-2007) and Htin Lin – who translated Nobel laureate Albert Camus's *The Outsider*.

The festival will incorporate translated books which have already been published and new books which are currently being translated in time for the festival.

"Interest in literature is declining. Readers are interested in news rather than literature, and youths spend too much time using the internet and are not interested in literature," U Pe Myint said.

"In my opinion, writers themselves are responsible for promoting literature. That is why we organised the event," he said.

The festival will include literary talks, group discussions, a book fair, photo exhibitions including an exhibition of photographs of Nobel laureates, poetry readings and nightly comedy performances. Around 200 local writers, cartoonists and poets will attend, along with a dozen international writers.

LOS ANGELES

Sony Pictures' 'The Interview' opens on Christmas Day

A FICTIONAL plot to kill North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un drew throngs of moviegoers on Christmas Day, as it became an unlikely symbol of free speech thanks to hacker threats that nearly scuppered its release.

The future of Sony's *The Interview* had been in doubt after the entertainment giant said it was cancelling the release following an embarrassing cyber attack on its corporate network and threats against patrons.

But massive support for its release, including from the White House, saw it open in theatres in the end.

And it was more than 300 independently owned theatres that took up the mantle, with some moviegoers dressed in patriotic red, white and blue or saying they were driven to see the film by their belief in free speech.

"It's controversial so I want to see it. I think it's something important, showing the freedom in the United States," said Adolfo Loustalot as he queued up to buy tickets outside a cinema in Los Angeles.

The film was also available on a variety of digital platforms, including Google Play, YouTube Movies, Microsoft's Xbox Video and on a Sony website.

The Plaza Theatre shows Sony Pictures' release of *The Interview* on December 25 in Atlanta, Georgia. Photo: AFP/Marcus Ingram

Star Seth Rogen and co-director Evan Goldberg made a surprise appearance at one of the first showings in Los Angeles just after midnight, when they thanked moviegoers and theaters for pushing to get the film out.

"We thought this might not happen at all," Rogen told a cheering crowd. "The fact that it's showing here and that you guys all came out," Goldberg said, "is super exciting." – *AFP*

The Global Gossip

LOS ANGELES
Madonna speaks of 'crazy times' after songs leaked
Madonna and Sony Pictures were both separately torpedoed by major hacks this month, in what the pop icon called "crazy times".

"Shit, this is the age that we're living in. It's crazy," she said on December 22, when asked about the investigation into how at least 10 of her unfinished, unreleased songs were leaked onto the internet.

"I mean, look at what's going on with Sony Pictures. It's just the age that we're living in. It's crazy times."

Washington accuses Pyongyang of being behind the hack at Sony that led to the release of embarrassing emails and caused executives to delay the debut of the madcap comedy action film *The Interview*.

The film about a fictional CIA plot to kill the country's leader infuriated North Korea, although Pyongyang has repeatedly denied it was behind the cyber assault on Sony.

"The internet is as constructive and helpful in bringing people together as it is in doing dangerous things and hurting people. It's a double-edged sword," Madonna said.

Indian Bollywood actress Bipasha Basu poses during a promotional event for the horror Hindi film *Alone* in Mumbai on December 22. Photo: AFP

TOKYO
Japan indicts vagina artist on obscenity charges
Japanese prosecutors on December 24 charged a feminist artist who makes objects shaped like her own vagina with distributing "obscene" data, according to her lawyer, in a case that has sparked accusations that authorities are out of touch.

The charges follow Megumi Igarashi's arrest this month after she raised funds online to pay for a genital-shaped kayak which she made on a 3D printer.

"We don't agree with the prosecutors' contention at all," Takeshi Sumi, one of Igarashi's lawyers, said.

"We will continue pleading not guilty on behalf of Igarashi, who argues her works are not anything obscene," Sumi said.

Igarashi, 42, was first arrested in July, but was freed after several days following a legal appeal and after thousands of people signed a petition demanding her release.

Japan's multi-billion-dollar pornography industry is large and varied, but obscenity laws still ban pictures of actual genitalia, which normally appear pixellated or behind black spots.

If convicted of distributing or possessing obscene materials for the purpose of selling, Igarashi could face up to two years in jail.

Helen Bonham Carter and Tim Burton attend the 85th Annual Academy Awards in Hollywood on February 24. Photo: AFP/ Valerie Macon

LOS ANGELES
Burton and Bonham Carter split after 13 years
Director Tim Burton and his long-time actress partner Helena Bonham Carter have separated after 13 years together, a spokesperson confirmed on December 23.

A representative for Bonham Carter, the star of the Harry Potter movies and Oscar-winning films including *The King's Speech*, said the couple had split "amicably".

"Tim Burton and Helena Bonham Carter separated amicably earlier this year and have continued to be friends and co-parent their children," publicist Karon Maskill said.

"We would ask that you respect their privacy and that of their children during this time."

Bonham Carter, 48, and Burton, 56, have two children together but never married. – *AFP*

Suwittawat, Veerawan, Chanchai and Nattaphon

Suwittawat Kaewwichian

3K battery anniversay

Guests joined the 3K battery team at their anniversary celebration event on December 18.

Patcharaporn Attachaipanit and Inthira Rattanachai

Queen of Christmas

Models competed to be crowned Queen of Christmas at Capital shopping mall on 21 December. The competition hopefuls strutted down the runway in Christmas-themed creations.

Yves Rocher launch

Yves Rocher celebrated the launch of its products at Junction Mawtin on December 20.

Ko Moe Oo

Nwe Ni

Daw May Thu Zaw

DOMESTIC FLIGHT SCHEDULES

YANGON TO NAY PYI TAW

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
FMI A1	1,2,3,4,5	7:15	8:15
FMI B1	1,2,3,4,5	10:45	11:45
FMI C1	1,2,3,4,5	17:00	18:00
FMI A1	6	8:00	9:00
FMI A1	7	15:30	16:30

NAY PYI TAW TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
FMI A2	1,2,3,4,5	8:35	9:35
FMI B2	1,2,3,4,5	13:30	14:30
FMI C2	1,2,3,4,5	18:20	19:20
FMI A2	6	10:00	11:00
FMI A2	7	17:00	18:00

YANGON TO MANDALAY

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 775	Daily	6:00	7:10
YH 917	7	6:00	7:40
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	8:05
K7 282	Daily	6:00	8:10
YH 917	1,2,3,4,5,6	6:10	8:30
W9 201	Daily	7:00	8:25
YJ 811	3	7:00	8:25
YH 835	1,7	7:00	8:40
YH 831	4,6	7:00	8:40
7Y 131	Daily	7:15	9:20
K7 266	Daily	8:00	10:05
8M 6603	4	9:00	10:10
YJ 751	7,5	10:45	12:40
YJ 601	6	11:00	12:25
YJ 211	7,5	11:00	12:25
YJ 601	4	11:00	12:25
YJ 233	6	11:00	12:55
YJ 201	1,2,4	11:00	12:55
YJ 761	1,2,4	11:00	12:55
YH 729	2,4,6	11:00	14:00
YH 829	5	11:00	15:05
YH 911	2	11:00	12:40
YH 826	3	11:00	12:40
YH 737	3,5	11:15	13:25
YH 727	1	11:15	13:25
YH 737	7	11:30	13:40
W9 251	2,5	11:30	12:55
7Y 941	1,3,4,6	11:45	13:10
7Y 841	2,5	11:45	13:10
7Y 943	7	11:45	13:10
K7 822	4,7	12:30	16:55
K7 622	1,3,5,7	13:00	14:25
K7 226	2,4,6	13:30	14:55
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	16:25
YH 731	Daily	15:00	17:10
Y5 234	Daily	15:20	16:30
W9 211	4	15:30	16:55

MANDALAY TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YH 910	4,5,6,7,	7:40	9:45
K7 283	Daily	8:25	11:30
YH 918	1,2,3,4,5,6	8:30	10:45
W9 201	Daily	8:40	10:35
YJ 811	3	8:40	10:05
7Y 132	Daily	9:35	11:30
YH 918	7	9:10	11:05
K7 267	Daily	10:20	12:25
YH 836	1,7	13:20	14:45
YH 832	4,6	13:20	14:45
YH 738	2	13:25	17:50
YH 830	5	15:05	18:55
YJ 202	1,2,4	15:30	16:55
YJ 602	4	15:40	17:05
YJ 602	6	15:40	17:35
YH 912	2	15:30	17:25
YJ 212	7,5	15:55	17:20
YJ 762	1,2,4	16:35	18:00
7Y 242	Daily	16:40	18:45
YH 728	1	16:45	18:10
Y5 776	Daily	17:10	18:20
W9 211	4	17:10	19:15
K7 823	2,4,7	17:10	18:35
YH 732	Daily	17:10	19:15
8M 6604	4	17:20	18:30
K7 227	2,4,6	17:20	18:45
8M 903	1,2,4,5,7	17:20	18:30
YH 738	5	17:25	18:50
YH 738	7	17:40	19:05
K7 623	1,3,5,7	17:40	19:05
YH 730	2,6	17:45	19:10
YJ 234	4	17:45	19:10
YH 827	3	17:50	19:15
YH 730	4	18:00	19:25
W9 252	2,5	18:15	19:40

YANGON TO NYAUNG U

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
K7 282	Daily	6:00	7:20
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	7:20
YH 917	7	6:00	7:40
YH 909	2,3,4,5	6:00	8:25
YH 917	1,2,3,4,5,6	6:10	7:45
YH 909	7	6:15	7:50
YH 633	2,3,5	6:30	8:10
YH 909	3	6:30	8:10
YJ 881	1,2,4,5,7	6:45	8:15
K7 242	Daily	7:00	8:20
YJ 801	6	7:00	8:20
YH 909	1,6	7:00	8:35
7Y 131	Daily	7:15	8:35
7Y 121	1	8:20	9:40
Y5 649	Daily	10:30	11:50
K7 264	Daily	14:30	16:40
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	17:10
YH 731	Daily	15:00	17:55
W9 129	1,3,6	15:30	17:35
W9 211	4	15:30	17:40

NYAUNG U TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YJ 891	Daily	7:35	10:15
YH 918	1,2,3,4,5,6	7:45	10:45
YH 634	2	7:55	9:15
YH 917	7	8:10	10:15
YH 910	3	8:10	10:15
YJ 881	1,2,4,5,7	8:20	10:25
YH 910	2,4,5,6	8:25	9:45
YH 918	7	8:25	11:05
YH 909	1	8:35	9:55
K7 242	Daily	8:35	11:45
YJ 801	6	8:35	9:55
7Y 131	Daily	8:50	11:30
YH 910	7	9:40	11:00
7Y 121	Daily	9:55	14:10
K7 283	Daily	10:10	11:30
Y5 650	Daily	13:55	15:15
K7 265	Daily	16:55	18:15
7Y 242	Daily	17:25	18:45
W9 129	1,3,6	17:50	19:10
YH 732	Daily	17:55	19:15

YANGON TO MYITKYINA

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YH 835	1,4,5,7	7:00	10:05
YH 831	4,7	7:00	10:05
YH 829	5	11:00	13:40
YJ 201	1,2,4	11:00	13:50
YJ 211	7,5	11:00	13:50
YJ 233	6	11:00	16:05
YH 826	3	11:00	14:05
W9 251	2,5	11:30	14:25
7Y 841	5	11:45	14:35
K7 622	1,3,5,7	13:00	15:55

MYITKYINA TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YJ 202	1,2,4	14:05	16:55
YJ 211	7,5	14:05	17:20
YH 836	1,4,7	11:55	14:45
YH 832	4,6	11:55	14:45
K7 623	1,3,5,7	16:10	19:05
YJ 234	4	16:20	19:10
YH 827	3	16:25	19:15
YH 830	5	16:30	18:55
W9 252	2,5	16:45	19:40

YANGON TO HEHO

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YJ 891	Daily	6:00	8:50
K7 282	Daily	6:00	9:00
YH 917	7	6:00	9:55
YH 917	1,2,3,4,5,6	6:10	9:35
YH 633	2,3,5	6:30	9:05
YJ 881	1,2,4,5,7	6:45	9:00
K7 242	Daily	7:00	9:15
W9 201	Daily	7:00	9:10
7Y 131	Daily	7:15	10:05
K7 266	Daily	8:00	9:15
7Y 121	Daily	8:20	10:35
Y5 649	Daily	10:30	12:45
YH 505	1,2,3,4,5,6	10:30	11:55
YJ 751	7,5	10:40	11:55
YJ 751	3	11:00	12:10
YJ 233	6	11:00	12:10
YJ 761	1,2,4	11:00	12:10
YH 727	1	11:15	12:40
YH 737	3,5	11:15	12:40
YH 737	7	11:30	12:55
7Y 941	1,2,4,6	11:45	13:55
K7 828	1,3,5	12:30	13:45
K7 822	2,4,7	12:30	13:45
K7 264	Daily	14:30	15:45
7Y 241	Daily	14:30	15:40
YH 731	1,2,3,4,5,7	15:00	16:25
W9 129	1,3,6	15:30	16:40

HEHO TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YJ 891	Daily	9:05	10:15
YH 634	2,3,5	9:05	10:15
YJ 881	1,2,4,5,7	9:15	10:25
K7 283	Daily	9:15	11:30
W9 201	Daily	9:25	10:35
K7 243	Daily	9:30	11:45
YH 918	1,2,3,4,5,6	9:35	10:45
7Y 132	Daily	10:20	11:30
7Y 121	Daily	10:50	14:10
K7 267	Daily	11:10	12:25
YH 506	1,2,3,4,5,6	11:55	14:00
Y5 650	Daily	13:00	15:15
YJ 762	1,2,4	15:50	18:00
7Y 241	Daily	15:55	18:45
K7 829	1,3,5	16:10	17:25
YH 728	1	16:00	18:10
YH 912	2	16:15	17:25
YH 732	Daily	16:25	19:15
K7 264	Daily	16:30	18:15
YH 738	2	16:40	17:50
YH 738	5,7	16:55	19:05
W9 129	1,3,6	16:55	19:10
YJ 752	3	17:15	18:25
YJ 752	7,5	17:40	19:05

YANGON TO MYEIK

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 325	1,5	6:45	8:15
7Y 531	1,5	7:00	8:38
K7 319	2,4,6	7:00	9:05
Y5 325	2	15:30	17:00

MYEIK TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 326	1,5	8:35	10:05
7Y 532	1,5	10:45	12:18
K7 320	2,4,6	11:30	13:35
Y5 326	2	17:15	18:45

YANGON TO SITTWE

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
W9 309	1,3,6	11:30	12:55
K7 422	Daily	13:00	14:55

SITTWE TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
W9 309	1,3,6	13:10	14:55
K7 423	Daily	15:10	16:30

YANGON TO THANDWE

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
K7 242	Daily	7:00	10:35
YH 505	1,2,3,4,5,6	10:30	13:10
W9 309	1,3,6	11:30	13:50
7Y 122	Daily	12:15	13:05
K7 422	Daily	13:00	13:35
Y5 421	1,3,4,6	15:45	16:40

THANDWE TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
K7 243	Daily	10:50	11:45
YH 506	1,2,3,4,5,6	13:10	14:00
7Y 122	Daily	13:20	14:10
W9 309	1,3,6	14:05	14:55
K7 422	Daily	14:10	16:30
Y5 422	1,3,4,6	16:55	17:50

YANGON TO DAWEI

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
K7 319	2,4,6	7:00	8:10
7Y 531	1,5	7:00	7:48

DAWEI TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
K7 320	2,4,6	12:25	13:35
7Y 532	1,5	11:30	12:18

YANGON TO LASHIO

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YJ 751	7,5	10:45	13:40
YJ 891	3	11:00	13:15
YH 729	2,4,6	11:00	13:00
7Y 741	1,5	11:30	13:18
K7 828	1,3,5	12:30	14:50

LASHIO TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
K7 829	1,3	15:05	15:55
K7 829	5	15:05	17:25
7Y 742	1,5	16:00	17:48
YJ 752	3	16:10	18:25
YJ 752	7,5	16:35	19:05
YH 730	2,4,6	16:45	19:10

YANGON TO PUTAO

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YH 835	1,4,7	7:00	11:00
YH 831	4,6,7	7:00	11:00
W9 251	2,5	11:30	15:25
YH 826	3	11:00	15:00

PUTAO TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
YH 835	1,4,7	11:00	14:45
YH 832	6,7	11:00	14:45
W9 252	2,5	15:45	19:40
YH 827	3	15:00	19:15

YANGON TO CHIANG MAI

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 251	2,4,6	6:15	8:05
7Y 305	1,5	11:00	12:50
W9 9607	4,7	14:30	16:20

CHIANG MAI TO YANGON

Flight	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 252	2,4,6	9:25	10:15
7Y 306	1,5	13:45	14:35
W9 9608	4,7	17:20	18:10

Domestic Airlines

Air Bagan (W9)
Tel: 513322, 513422, 504888. Fax: 515102

Air KBZ (K7)
Tel: 372977~80, 533030~39 (airport), 373766 (hotline). Fax: 372983

Asian Wings (YJ)
Tel: 515261~264, 512140, 512473, 512640
Fax: 532333, 516654

FMI Air Charter
Tel: 240363, 240373, 09421146545

Golden Myanmar Airlines (Y5)
Tel: 09400446999, 09400447999
Fax: 8604051

Mann Yadanarpon Airlines (7Y)
Tel: 656969
Fax: 656998, 651020

Yangon Airways (YH)
Tel: 383100, 383107, 700264
Fax: 652 533

Airline Codes

7Y = Mann Yadanarpon Airlines

FMI = FMI Air Charter

K7 = Air KBZ

W9 = Air Bagan

Y5 = Golden Myanmar Airlines

YH = Yangon Airways

YJ = Asian Wings

Subject to change without notice

Day			
1	= Monday	4	= Thursday
2	= Tuesday	5	= Friday
3	= Wednesday	6	= Saturday
		7	= Sunday

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT SCHEDULES

YANGON TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 706	Daily	6:05	8:20
8M 335	Daily	8:40	10:25
TG 304	Daily	9:50	11:45
PG 702	Daily	10:30	12:25
TG 302	Daily	14:50	16:45
PG 708	Daily	15:20	17:15
8M 331	Daily	16:30	18:15
PG 704	Daily	18:20	20:15
Y5 237	Daily	19:00	20:50
TG 306	Daily	19:50	21:45

BANGKOK TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
TG 303	Daily	8:00	8:45
PG 701	Daily	8:45	9:40
Y5 238	Daily	21:30	22:20
8M 336	Daily	11:55	12:40
TG 301	Daily	13:05	13:50
PG 707	Daily	13:40	14:30
PG 703	Daily	17:05	17:35
TG 305	Daily	18:05	18:50
8M 332	Daily	19:20	20:05
PG 705	Daily	20:10	21:25

YANGON TO DON MUEANG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
DD 4231	Daily	8:00	9:45
FD 252	Daily	8:30	10:20
FD 256	Daily	12:50	14:40
FD 254	Daily	17:35	19:25
FD 258	Daily	21:30	23:15
DD 4239	Daily	21:00	22:55

DON MUEANG TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
DD 4230	Daily	6:30	7:15
FD 251	Daily	7:15	8:00
FD 255	Daily	11:35	12:20
FD 253	Daily	16:20	17:05
FD 257	Daily	20:15	20:55
DD 4238	Daily	19:25	20:15

YANGON TO SINGAPORE			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 231	Daily	8:00	12:25
Y5 2233	Daily	9:45	14:15
TR 2823	Daily	9:45	14:35
SQ 997	Daily	10:25	15:10
3K 582	Daily	11:20	15:50
MI 533	2,4,6	13:35	20:50
MI 515	1,3	13:50	18:20
MI 519	Daily	16:40	21:15
3K 584	2,3,5	19:30	0:10

SINGAPORE TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
TR 2822	Daily	7:20	8:45
Y5 2234	Daily	7:20	8:50
SQ 998	Daily	7:55	9:20
3K 5	Daily	11:20	15:50
MI 533	2,4,7	11:30	12:45
8M 232	Daily	13:25	14:50
MI 518	Daily	14:20	15:45
MI 516	1,3	11:30	12:55

YANGON TO KUALA LUMPUR			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
AK 505	Daily	8:30	12:45
MH 741	Daily	12:15	16:30
8M 501	1,2,3,5,6	14:00	18:00
MH 743	Daily	16:00	20:15
AK 503	Daily	19:05	23:20

KUALA LUMPUR TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
AK 504	Daily	6:55	8:00
MH 740	Daily	10:05	11:15
8M 502	1,2,3,5,6	12:50	13:50
MH 742	Daily	13:50	15:00
AK 502	Daily	17:20	18:25

YANGON TO BEIJING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 906	3,5,7	23:50	0550+1

BEIJING TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 905	3,5,7	19:30	22:50

YANGON TO GUANGZHOU			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 711	2,4,7	8:40	13:15
CZ 3056	3,6	11:35	15:55
CZ 3056	1,5	17:40	22:10

GUANGZHOU TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CZ 3055	3,6	8:35	10:35
CZ 3055	1,5	14:40	16:40
8M 712	2,4,7	14:15	15:50

YANGON TO TAIPEI			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CI 7916	Daily	10:50	16:10

TAIPEI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CI 7915	Daily	7:00	9:50

YANGON TO KUNMING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
CA 416	Daily	12:30	15:55
MU 2012	3	12:40	18:50
MU 2032	1,2,4,5,6,7	14:50	18:15

KUNMING TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2011	3	8:25	11:50
CA 905	Daily	11:10	11:30
MU 2031	1,2,4,5,6,7	13:30	14:00

YANGON TO HANOI			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 956	1,3,5,6,7	19:10	21:25

HANOI TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 957	1,3,5,6,7	16:40	18:10

YANGON TO HO CHI MINH CITY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 942	2,4,7	14:25	17:05

HO CHI MINH CITY TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
VN 943	2,4,7	11:45	13:25

YANGON TO DOHA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 919	1,4,6	7:55	11:40

DOHA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
QR 918	3,5,7	19:45	0459+1

YANGON TO SEOUL			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
0Z 770	4,7	0:50	8:50
KE 472	Daily	23:35	7:45

SEOUL TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KE 471	Daily	18:30	22:40
0Z 769	3,6	19:30	23:40

YANGON TO HONG KONG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KA 251	Daily	01:10	05:25

HONG KONG TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
KA 250	Daily	21:45	21:30

YANGON TO TOKYO			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
NH 914	Daily	22:10	6:45

TOKYO TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
NH 913	Daily	11:45	17:15

YANGON TO DHAKA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
BG 061	2	11:45	13:00
BG 061	5	19:45	21:00

DHAKA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
BG 060	2	8:30	10:45
BG 060	5	16:30	18:45

YANGON TO INCHEON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
W9 607	4,7	14:30	16:20
8M 902	1,2,4,5,7	1:35	9:10
8M 7702	Daily	23:55	07:45+1

INCHEON TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
W9 608	4,7	17:20	18:10
8M 7701	Daily	18:30	22:30

YANGON TO GAYA			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 601	3,5,6	10:30	11:50

GAYA TO YANGON			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
8M 602	3,5,6	12:50	16:00

MANDALAY TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 710	Daily	14:15	16:40
FD 245	Daily	12:50	15:15

BANGKOK TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 709	Daily	12:05	13:25
FD 244	Daily	10:55	12:20

MANDALAY TO SINGAPORE			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MI 533	2,4,7	15:45	20:50
Y5 2233	1,2,4,5,6	7:50	14:15

SINGAPORE TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
Y5 2234	Daily	7:20	16:30
MI 533	2,4,7	11:30	14:50

MANDALAY TO DON MUEANG			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 245	Daily	12:50	15:15

DON MUEANG TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
FD 244	Daily	10:55	12:20

MANDALAY TO KUNMING			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2030	Daily	13:50	16:40

KUNMING TO MANDALAY			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
MU 2029	Daily	12:55	12:50

NAY PYI TAW TO BANGKOK			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 722	1,2,3,4,5	19:45	22:45

BANGKOK TO NAY PYI TAW			
Flights	Days	Dep	Arr
PG 721	1,2,3,4,5	17:15	19:15

International Airlines

Air Asia (FD)
Tel: 09254049991~3

Air Bagan Ltd.(W9)
Tel: 513322, 513422, 504888. Fax: 515102

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Tel: 666112, 655882

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Bangkok Airways (PG)
Tel: 255122, 255265. Fax: 255119

Biman Bangladesh Airlines (BG)
Tel: 371867~68. Fax: 371869

Condor (DE)
Tel: 370836~39 (ext: 303)

Dragonair (KA)
Tel: 255320, 255321. Fax: 255329

Golden Myanmar Airlines (Y5)
Tel: 09400446999, 09400447999
Fax: 8604051

Malaysia Airlines (MH)
Tel: 387648, 241007 (ext: 120, 121, 122)
Fax: 241124

Myanmar Airways International (8M)
Tel: 255260. Fax: 255305

Nok Airline (DD)
Tel: 255050, 255021. Fax: 255051

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Tel: 255491~6. Fax: 255223

Tiger Airline (TR)
Tel: 371383, 370836~39 (ext: 303)

Vietnam Airlines (VN)
Tel: 255066, 255088, 255068. Fax: 255086

Airline Codes

- 3K = Jet Star
- 8M = Myanmar Airways International
- AK = Air Asia
- BG = Biman Bangladesh Airlines
- CA = Air China
- CI = China Airlines
- CZ = China Southern
- DD = Nok Airline
- FD = Air Asia
- KA = Dragonair
- KE = Korea Airlines
- MH = Malaysia Airlines
- MI = Silk Air
- MU = China Eastern Airlines
- NH = All Nippon Airways
- PG = Bangkok Airways
- QR = Qatar Airways
- SQ = Singapore Airways
- TG = Thai Airways
- TR = Tiger Airline
- VN = Vietnam Airline
- Y5 = Golden Myanmar Airlines

Subject to change without notice

Day
1 = Monday
2 = Tuesday
3 = Wednesday
4 = Thursday
5 = Friday
6 = Saturday
7 = Sunday

FRANCE

Sleeping with polar bears: French zoos evolve

PATRICK BAERT

FORGET trekking to the Arctic. French tourists are opting for the luxury way to spend the night with a polar bear: beside a log fire not far from home.

The only thing on ice is the champagne.

Since launching "A night at home with the bear" in October, La Fleche zoo in western France has booked up its comfy lodge overlooking Taiko the polar bear's enclosure until the end of 2015.

Safari-style lodges are part of a strategy by French animal parks to update ageing structures and attract new visitors. They follow a worldwide trend, from an Africa-themed resort at a zoo in Canberra, Australia, to party nights at zoos from London to Los Angeles.

La Fleche zoo, which opened in 1946, was in need of a boost when it opened its first lodge in 2013.

Visitor numbers soon increased and the park now has eight lodges.

Their style reflects the architecture of areas where the neighbouring animals would normally reside – arctic lodges with log fires for observing polar bears, Asian-style lodges surrounded by bamboo and rice-paddies for tiger-watching.

With immense bay windows, the three-star, six-person polar bear lodge costs at least US$250 per adult per night.

Visitors can observe Taiko and another polar bear, Katinka, swimming underwater through a massive window connected to the comfortable parental suite.

Champagne and a gastronomic dinner are on the menu, while the howls of Arctic wolves ring out through the night.

"The idea is that visitors feel like they're in a cocoon suspended in time, totally immersed in the animal environment," said the zoo's owner Stephane Da Cunha.

Six other lodges are due to open by 2016, ahead of "a big African savannah project", to include a hotel complex for business customers.

The project – which cost more than $370,000 for the most luxurious polar bear section alone – should be profitable within several years since the accommodation is fully booked, Da Cunha said.

Other French zoos are trying similar initiatives, including Cerza, in western France, and Sainte-Croix, in the northeast, which houses European animals.

Visitors to Sainte-Croix must wait almost one-and-a-half years to make a reservation for its most expensive lodge near the wolf enclosure, said spokesperson Clement Leroux.

Le Pal zoo, in southern France, will increase its lodges from 24 to 31 in 2015. "There's an extremely strong demand," said its director, Arnaud Bennet.

"Zoos have to renovate to keep up with a fickle public," said Sophie Huberson, from the National Union of Leisure, Amusement and Cultural Spaces.

"All zoos which have created unusual lodgings have seen their takings rise," Huberson said.

"They'll all end up following this model, which lets them increase their capacity to invest," she said. "Those which don't evolve will see their visitor numbers drop."

'Zoos which don't evolve will see their visitor numbers drop'

Sophie Huberson

Some zoos, like the main zoo in Paris, have invested in more natural and spacious surroundings in a bid to attract more visitors.

They aim to extend the time visitors stay, so they eat at on-site restaurants and buy souvenirs, in an economic model similar to that of theme parks, Huberson said.

France's top zoo followed a slightly different formula to success, with huge hotels outside the park. Beauval, in northern France, has more than 1 million visitors annually and 6000 animals.

The zoo opened its first hotel, outside the site, in 2008. It will open a third next year, with a China theme in reference to its pandas. The whole complex will have 900 bedrooms.

"They told us it wouldn't work," said managing director Rodolphe Delordhe.

"Today, people are spending their holidays here." – *AFP*

Guests watch Taiko the polar bear from their lodge in La Fleche zoo, France, on December 12. Photo: AFP

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DAGON, Near Park Royal Hotel, 1250 Sqft, One bed room with Toilet, one single bed room. Lift, fully furnished, 1400 USD per month, Ph: 09-7958-84155.

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Employment

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Ingo Position

(1)**PROGRAM Officer** (CBHFA) (NayPyiTaw) 1 Post. (2) **DRIVER** (Sittwe) 2 Posts (3) **Finance Officer** (Yangon) 1 Post (4)**Logistics Officer** (Sittwe) 1 Post (5) **Medical Doctor** (Sittwe) 3 Posts (6) **Nurse** (Sittwe) 4 Posts. Please send application letter, CV & related documents to Myanmar Red Cross Society (Head Office) Yazatingaha Rd, Dekkhinathiri, NayPyiTaw. Ormrcshrrecruitment@gmail.com www. myanmar redcross society.org

THE INT'L Rescue Committee (IRC) is seeking (1)**Health Training Officer** - 1 post in Hpa-an, Kayin State: (2)**Medical Doctor** (M.B.,B.S) : 1 year experience. Good command of English & Myanmar. (3)**Social Accountability & Gender Officer** 1 post in Tatkon, Nay Pyi Taw: Academic degree in communications, journalism, or related areas. 3 years of community development. Fluency in English. (4)**Senior Officer** 1 Post in Kayin State: 3 years experience. Some knowledge of English would be an asset. Skilled in Excel, Word software. Please submit Cover letter & CV to the HR Department by email at: WaiMar.Naing@rescue.org Closing date: 30th December 2014.

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(1)**PROGRAM Manager** (CBHD-MNCH) (NayPyiTaw) 1 Post (2)**Finance & Admin Officer** (Taunggyi) 1 Post (3)**Livelihood Field Officer** (Sittwe) 1 Post. (4)**Admin & Finance Assistant** (Matupi) 1 Post (5)**Admin Assistant** (Hpa-an) 1 Post (6) **Consultant** for SBDRR 1 Post (7)**Driver** (Yangon) 1 Post (8)**Finance Assistant** (Hpa-an) 1 Post (9)**CSR Program Officer** 1 Post (10) **Engineer** (Consultant for Renovation)(Mindat/ Matupi) 2 Posts. Please send application letter, CV & related documents to Myanmar Red Cross Society (Head Office) Yazatingaha Rd, Dekkhinathiri, NayPyiTaw. Ormrcshrrecruitment@gmail.com www. myanmarredcross society.org

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HOTEL Shwe Gone Daing, Yangon, (1) Kitchen Department: **Commis I, Commis II, Commis III, Kitchen Helper, Steward, Kitchen Dimsum**, (2)HK Department: **HK Supervisor, Room Attendant, PA Attendant, Laundry Supervisor, Laundry Attendant, Linen Attendant,** (3)F & B Department: **F & B Manager, F & B Supervisor, F & B Ass: Supervisor, F & B Cashier, F & B Waiter**, (4)Entainment Department: **Cashier, Waiter, Bar Waitress, Cleaner, Bell Boy**, (5) FO Department: **FO Supervisor, Receptionist, Bell Boy**, (6) Finance Department: **Driver, Store Supervisor, Store keeper, Logistics**, (7)IT Department: **CCTV Operator**, (8)M & E Department: **M & E Operator**. Hotel Shwe Gone Daing, No. (273/A), Shwe Gone Daing St, Bahan, Yangon, Ph: 552583, 552585, Email: monyeekyaw@gmail.com

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VINTAGE LUXURY Yacht Hotel is seeking qualified candidates with attractive salary to fill in the following positions: (1)**Executive Sous Chef** - M/F 2 Posts (2)**Chef de Partie** - M/F 1 Post (3)**Front Office Manager** - M/F 1 Post (4) **Duty Manager** - M/F 1 Post (5)**Front Office Supervisor** - M/F 2 Posts (6)**Reservation Supervisor** - M/F 1 Post (7)**Bell Driver** (Salary + others) above-250000 M/F 3 Posts (8)**Sales & Marketing Asst: Manager** - M/F 1 Post (9)**Sales & Marketing Assistant** - M/F 1 Post (10)**Purchasing Supervisor** - M/F 1 Post (11)**Painist** - M/F 1 Post (12)**Villinist** - M/F 1 Post (13)**Guitarist** - M/F 1 Post. CV form to be submit to HR Department: No. 6, Botahtaung Jetty, Seikkan Tsp. Ph: 09-2544-43327.

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G STAR HOTEL (Yangon) is seeking (1) **HR Manager** - F 1 post (2)**Assistant HR** - F 1 post (3)**Accountant** - M/F 2 posts (4)**Chief Account** - F 1 post (5)**HK Supervisor** - M 1 post (6)**Security** - M 3 posts. Please submit to 20/B, C, Thukhawati St, West Yankin. Ph: 09-3210-9590, 09-3210-9591

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EMBASSIES

Australia 88, Strand Road, Yangon. Tel : 251810, 251797, 251798.

Bangladesh 11-B, Than Lwin Road, Yangon. Tel: 515275, 526144, email: bdootygn@mptmail.net.mm

Brazil 56, Pyay Road, 6th mile, Hlaing Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 507225, 507251. email: Administ. yangon@itamaraty.gov.br.

Brunei 17, Kanbawza Avenue, Golden Velly (1), Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 566985, 503978. email: bruneiemb@ bruneiemb.com.mm

Cambodia 25 (3B/4B), New University Avenue Road, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 549609, 540964. email: RECYANGON @ mptmail.net.mm

Canada 9th Floor, Centerpoint Towers, 65 Sule Pagoda Road, Yangon, Tel : 01-384805 , Fax :01 384806, Email : yngon@ international.gc.ca

China 1, Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Road, Yangon. Tel: 221280, 221281.

Denmark, No.7, Pyi Thu St, Pyay Rd, 7 Miles, Mayangone Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 01 – 9669520 - 17.

Egypt 81, Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Road, Yangon. Tel: 222886, 222887, Egyptembassy86@gmail. com

France 102, Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Road, Yangon. Tel: 212178, 212520, email: ambaf rance. rangoun@ diplomatie.fr

Germany 9, Bogyoke Aung San Museum Road, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 548951, 548952, email: info@rangun. diplo.de

India 545-547, Merchant St, Yangon. Tel: 391219, 388412, email:indiaembassy @mptmail.net.mm

Indonesia 100, Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Rd, Yangon. Tel: 254465, 254469, email: kukygn @indonesia.com. mm

Israel 15, Khabaung Street, Hlaing Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 515115, fax: 515116, email: info@yangon.mfa. gov.il

Italy 3, Inya Myaing Road, Golden Valley, Yangon. Tel: 527100, 527101, fax: 514565, email: ambyang. mail@ esteri.it

Japan 100, Natmauk Rd, Yangon. Tel: 549644-8, 540399, 540400, 540411, 545988, fax: 549643

Kuwait 62-B, Shwe Taung Kyar St, Bahan Tsp. Tel : 01-230-9542, 230-9543. Fax : 01-230-5836.

Laos A-1, Diplomatic Quarters, Tawwin Road, Dagon Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 222482, Fax: 227446, email: Laoembcab@ mptmail. net.mm

Malaysia 82, Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Road, Yangon. Tel: 220248, 220249, email: mwkyangon@ mptmail.net.mm

Nepal 16, Natmauk Yeiktha, Yangon. Tel: 545880, 557168, fax: 549803, email: nepemb @ mptmail.net.mm

Norway, No.7, Pyi Thu St, Pyay Rd, 7 Miles, Mayangone Tsp,Yangon. Tel: 01 – 9669520 - 17 Fax – 01- 9669516

New Zealand No. 43/C, Inya Myaing Rd, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 01-2306046-9 Fax : 01-2305805

Netherlands No. 43/C, Inya Myaing Rd, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel : 01-2305805

North Korea 77C, Shin Saw Pu Rd, Sanchaung Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 512642, 510205

Pakistan A-4, diplomatic Quarters, Pyay Rd, Yangon. Tel: 222881 (Chancery Exchange)

Philippines 50, Sayasan Rd, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 558149-151,Email: p.e. yangon@gmail.com

Saudi Arabia No.6/S, Inya Yeiktha St, 10th Qtr, Mayangone Tsp, Yangon, Tel: (951) 652-344, 652-344, Fax: (951) 657-983

Russia 38, Sagawa Rd, Yangon. Tel: 241955, 254161,

Serbia No. 114-A, Inya Rd, P.O.Box No. 943, Yangon. Tel: 515282, 515283, email: serbemb @ yangon.net.mm

Singapore 238, Dhamazedi Road, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 559001, email: singemb_ ygn@_sgmfa. gov.sg

South Korea 97 University Avenue, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 527142-4, 515190, fax: 513286, email: myanmar@mofat.go.kr

Sri Lanka 34 Taw Win Rd, Yangon. Tel: 222812,

Switzerland No 11, Kabaung Lane, 5 ½ mile, Pyay Rd, Hlaing Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 534754, 507089.

Thailand 94 Pyay Rd, Dagon Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 226721, 226728, 226824

Turkey 19AB, Kan Yeik Thar St, Mayangone Tsp,Yangon. Tel : 662992, Fax : 661365

United Kingdom 80 Strand Rd, Yangon. Tel: 370867, 380322, 371852, 371853, 256438,

United States of America 110, University Avenue, Kamayut Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 536509, 535756, Fax: 650306

Vietnam Bldg-72, Thanlwin Rd, Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: 511305

UNITED NATIONS

ILO Liaison 1-A, Kanbae (Thitsar Rd), Yankin Tsp, Tel : 01-566538, 566539

IOM 318 (A) Ahlone Rd, Dagon Tsp, Yangon.Tel – 01-210588, 09 73236679, 0973236680, Email- iomyangon@iom.int

UNAIDS 137/1, Thaw Wun Rd, Kamayut Tsp. Tel : 534498, 504832

UNDCP 11-A, Malikha St, Mayangone tsp. Tel: 666903, 664539.

UNDP 6, Natmauk Rd, Bahan tel: 542910-19. fax: 292739.

UNFPA 6, Natmauk Rd, Bahan tsp. tel: 546029.

UNHCR 287, Pyay Rd, Sanchaung tsp. Tel: 524022, 524024.

UNIAP Rm: 1202, 12 Fl, Traders Hotel. Tel: 254852, 254853.

UNIC 6, Natmauk St., Bahan, tel: 52910~19

UNICEF 14~15 Flr, Traders Hotel. P.O. Box 1435, Kyauktada. Tel: 375527~32, unicef.yangon@unicef. org,

UNODC 11-A, Malikha Rd., Ward 7, Mayangone. tel: 01-9666903, 9660556, 9660538, 9660398. email: fo.myanmar@unodc.org

UNOPS 120/0, Pyi Thu Lane, 7 Miles, Mayangone Tsp. Tel: 951-657281~7. Fax: 657279.

UNRC 6, Natmauk Rd, P.O. Box 650, TMWE Tel: 542911~19, 292637 (Resident Coordinator),

WFP 5 Kan Baw Za St, Shwe Taung Kyar, (Golden Valley), Bahan Tsp. Tel : 2305971~6

WHO No. 2, Pyay Rd, 7 Mile, Mayangone Tsp, Tel : 650405-6, 650416, 654386-90.

ASEAN Coordinating Of. for the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force, 79, Taw Win st, Dagon Tsp. Tel: 225258.

FAO Myanma Agriculture Service Insein Rd, Insein. tel: 641672, 641673.

For more information about these listings, Please Contact - **classified.mcm@gmail.com**

Emergency Numbers

Ambulance ☎tel: 295133.
Fire ☎tel: 191, 252011, 252022.
Police emergency ☎tel: 199.
Police headquarters ☎tel: 282541, 284764.
Red Cross ☎tel:682600, 682368
Traffic Control Branch ☎tel:298651
Department of Post & Telecommunication ☎tel: 591384, 591387.
Immigration ☎tel: 286434.
Ministry of Education ☎tel:545500m 562390
Ministry of Sports ☎tel: 370604, 370605
Ministry of Communications ☎tel: 067-407037.
Myanma Post & Telecommunication (MPT) ☎tel: 067-407007.
Myanma Post & Tele-communication (Accountant Dept) ☎tel: 254563, 370768.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs ☎tel: 067-412009, 067-412344.
Ministry of Health ☎tel: 067-411358-9.
Yangon City Development Committee ☎tel: 248112.

HOSPITALS

Central Women's Hospital ☎tel: 221013, 222811.
Children Hospital ☎tel: 221421, 222807
Ear, Nose & Throat Hospital ☎tel: 543888.
Naypyitaw Hospital (emergency) ☎tel: 420096.
Worker's Hospital ☎tel: 554444, 554455, 554811.
Yangon Children Hospital ☎tel: 222807, 222808, 222809.
Yangon General Hospital (East) ☎tel: 292835, 292836, 292837.
Yangon General Hospital (New) ☎tel: 384493, 384494, 384495, 379109.
Yangon General Hospital (West) ☎tel: 222860, 222861, 220416.
Yangon General Hospital (YGH) ☎tel: 256112, 256123, 281443, 256131.

ELECTRICITY

Power Station ☎tel:414235

POST OFFICE

General Post Office
39, Bo Aung Kyaw St. (near British Council Library). ☎tel: 285499.

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Yangon International Airport ☎tel: 662811.

YANGON PORT

Shipping (Coastal vessels) ☎tel: 382722

RAILWAYS

Railways information
☎tel: 274027, 202175-8.

General Listing

ACCOMMODATION- HOTELS

Asia Plaza Hotel
YANGON
No. 277, Bogyoke Aung San Road, Corner of 38th Street, Kyauktada Township, Yangon, Myanmar.
Tel : (951) 391070, 391071.
Reservation@391070 (Ext) 1910, 106.
Fax : (951) 391375. Email : hotelasiaplaza@gmail.com

BEST WESTERN Green Hill Hotel
No. 12, Pho Sein Road, Tamwe Township, Yangon
Tel : (95-1) 209299, 209300, 209343 Fax : (95-1) 209344
bestwestern.com/ greenhillhotelyangon.com

Clover hotel
No.7A, Wingabar Road, Bahan Tsp, Yangon.
Tel : (951) 546313, 430245. 09-731-77781~4.
Fax : (01) 546313.
www.cloverhotel.asia.
info@cloverhotel.asia

Clover Hotel City Center
No. 217, 32nd Street (Upper Block), Pabedan Tsp, Yangon, Myanmar.
Tel : 377720, Fax : 377722
www.clovercitycenter.asia

Clover Hotel City Center Plus
No. 229, 32nd Street (Upper Block), Pabedan Tsp, Yangon, Myanmar.
Tel : 377975, Fax : 377974
www.clovercitycenterplus.asia

Eden Palace Hotel
No. (356/366), Kyaikkasan Rd, Tamwe Township, Yangon, Myanmar.
Ph: 542826, Fax: 545650
Email: reservation@ edenpalacehotel.com

GRAND PALACE HOTEL
M-22, Shwe Htee Housing, Thamine Station St., Near the Bayint Naung Point, Mayangone Tsp., Yangon
Tel : 522763, 522744, 667557. Fax : (95-1) 652174
E-mail : grandpalace@ myanmar.com.mm

MK HOTEL
No.1, Wut Kyaung St, Yay Kyaw, Pazundaung Tsp, Yangon, Myanmar.
Ph: 01-8610640, 01-202187,
www.mkhotelyangon.com

Excel Treasure Hotel Yangon
No.520, Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, Myanmar.
Tel: 01-559150 to 7
Fax: 01-559150

Excel River View Hotel
No.(3) Block (1 to 4), Near Thanlyin Bridge, Thanlyin Township, Yangon Myanmar.
Tel: 056-22550, 09-8601892, Fax: 056-22546,

Excel Palace Hotel
No.(25, D1), New University Avenue Road, Bahan Township, Yangon, Myanmar.
Tel: 01-544491, 01-556601
Fax: 525028, 01-544604
excel@myanmar.com.mm
autospeed123@gmail.com
www.exceltreasurehotel.com

Hotel Grand United (Chinatown)
621, Maharbandoola Rd, Latha Tsp, Yangon.
Tel: (95-1) 372256-58

(21st Downtown)
66-70, 21st Street (Enter from Strand Rd), Latha Tsp, Yangon. Tel: (95-1) 378201

(Ahlone Branch)
35, Min Ye Kyaw Swar Rd, Ahlone Tsp, Yangon.
Tel: (95-1) 218061-64;
Email: grandunited. head@gmail.com, www. hotelgrandunited.com

HOTEL YANKIN
186, Lu Nge Thitsar Street, on Thitsar Road, Yankin Township, Yangon, Myanmar. Ph: +951-8550 283, +951-8550 284, +959-2540 63632, E-mail: enquiry@hotelyankin.com, www.hotelyankin.com

MGM Hotel No (160), Warden Street, Lanmadaw Tsp, Yangon, Myanmar. +95-1-212454~9. www. hotel-mgm.com

PANDA hotel
No. 205, Corner of Wadan Street & Min Ye Kyaw Swa Road, Lanmadaw Tsp, Yangon. Myanmar.
Tel: (95-1) 212850 ~ 3, 229358 ~ 61,
Fax: (95-1) 212854.
info@myanmarpandahotel .com http://www. myanmarpandahotel.com

PARKROYAL Yangon, Myanmar
33, Alan Pya Pagoda Rd, Dagon tsp.
tel: 250388. fax: 252478.

Royal White Elephant Hotel
No-11, Kan Street, Hlaing Tsp. Yangon, Myanmar.
(+95-1) 500822, 503986.
www.rwehotel.com

Windsor Hotel No.31, Shin Saw Pu Street, Sanchaung. Yangon, Myanmar.
Ph: 95-1-511216~8, www. hotelwindsoryangon.com

Winner Inn
42, Than Lwin Rd, Bahan Tsp. Tel: 503734, 524387.
email: reservation@winner innmyanmar.com

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YANGON MYANMAR
17, Kabar Aye Pagoda Rd, Yankin Tsp.
Tel: 650933. Fax: 650960.
Email : micprm@ myanmar.com.mmwww. myanmar micasahotel.com

Marina Residence
8, Kabar Aye Pagoda Rd, Mayangone Tsp.
tel: 6506 51~4. fax: 650630.

Sakura Residence
9, Inya Rd, Kamaryut Tsp.
tel: 525001. fax: 525002.

Savoy Hotel
129, Damazedi Rd, Kamayut tsp.
tel: 526289, 526298,

Sedona Hotel
Kabar Aye Pagoda Rd, Yankin. tel: 666900.

Strand Hotel
92 Strand Rd. tel: 243377. fax: 289880.

Summit Parkview Hotel
350, Ahlone Rd, Dagon Tsp. tel: 211888, 211966.

Sule Shangri-La Hotel
223 Sule Pagoda Rd. tel: 242828. fax: 242838.

QUICKGUIDE

ACCOMMODATION-HOTELS (Nay Pyi Taw)

Excel Capital Hotel Nay Pyi Taw
No.(23/24), Yarza Thingaha Rd, Dekhina Thiri Township Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar.
Tel: 067-8106011 to 17,
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La Source Beauty Spa
80-A, Inya Rd, Kamayut Tsp.
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Beauty Bar by La Source
Room (1004), Sedona Hotel,
Tel : 666 900 Ext : 7167
MANDALAY
La Source Beauty Spa
13/13, Mya Sandar St,
bet: 26_27, bet: 62_63,
Chanaye Tharzan Tsp.
Tel : 09-4440-24496.
www.lasourcebeautyspa.com

BOOK STORES

Monument Books — Monument Toys

- 150 Dhamazedi Rd., Bahan Tsp, Yangon. Tel: (01) 536306, 537805.

Email: mbt.marketing.mgr@gmail.com
- 15(B), Departure Lounge, Yangon Int'l Airport.
- # 87/2, Crn of 26th & 27th St, 77th St, Chan Aye Thar Zan Tsp, Mandalay. Tel: (02) 24880

ELT Showroom:
- # 43, 165 St, Tarmwe Tsp, Yangon. Tel: (09) 5116687

MYANMAR BOOK CENTRE
Nandawun Compound, No. 55, Baho Road, Corner of Baho Road and Ahlone Road, (near Eugenia Restaurant), Ahlone Township. tel: 212 409, 221 271. 214708
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The follies, farces and flubs of 2014

Photo: AFP

USA really doesn't get cricket

New Zealander cricketer Jimmy Neesham had a shock travelling through America when his bat was drilled full of holes by customs officials.

The 23-year-old, who was in transit between matches for his Caribbean Premier League team, the Guyana Amazon Warriors, tweeted a picture of his bat after its going-over.

"Imagine if your cricket gear went through America and they drilled holes in your bat to look for drugs," he wrote on his Twitter account, @JimmyNeesh.

The photo showed three holes drilled into the side of Neesham's bat.

Beak problem as seagull photo-bombs photo-finish

A seagull ran two horses close in a British race when he flew in front of the finish-line camera judging a photo-finish.

The incident happened at the English south coast venue of Brighton when the photo-finish print showed the bird swooping across Jewelled, who was declared the winner, and Sagesse in second.

"We are about a mile and a half from the sea, and there are a lot of seagulls around, but this has never happened before as far as we are aware," racecourse spokesperson George Hill told the BBC.

"The bird just happened to be in the right place at the right time."

To Quinn or not to Quinn, that was the question

American Winter Olympics bobsledder Johnny Quinn became a verb after pictures of him smashing through a locked Sochi bathroom door became an internet hit.

The Twitter hashtag #Quinning trended alongside similar frustrated tales of breaking out and through various barriers and objects.

Fans tweeted pictures of wine bottles being broken open and food cartons ripped apart in the act of "Quinning".

Quinn's internet fame was boosted two days after his bathroom episode when he posted pictures of himself trapped in an elevator.

Corinthians till I die - and beyond

Fans of Brazilian giants Corinthians were able to show their allegiance for eternity after the club confirmed plans to open a dedicated cemetery for their supporters.

Up to 70,000 plots were to be made available for fans in the "Corinthians Forever" graveyard due to open in 2015, the club announced.

Plots cost between 4,500 and 7,800 reais (between US$1870 and $3240) depending on the area of the complex selected and proximity to club idols who will also be laid to rest at the site.

Greek ref says no pay, no play

A Greek Cup tie between Super League club Niki Volos and second division Zakynthos was cancelled after the home team could not raise enough money to pay the referees.

Referee Michalis Voskakis waited 30 minutes from the start of the match for Niki officials to provide the 3600 euros to pay the four match officials but when they failed to do so, they called off the game.

Backhand compliment

Perhaps it was meant as a backhanded compliment when vandals made off with the racket that was clasped in the hands of a statue of Argentine tennis star Gabriela Sabatini in Buenos Aires.

The miscreants left the artwork looking rather empty-handed just a few weeks after it was made public on the Rio de la Plata waterfront.

They severed the bronze-coloured racket that was formerly clasped tightly in the statue's hands, leaving Sabatini sans racket as she lines up for a backhand smash.

During her 11 years as a pro, Sabatini, now 44, won 27 titles including the US Open, when she beat Steffi Graf in 1990. She is the only Argentine woman to have won a Grand Slam singles victory.

India marathon leaders miss turn, take the bus

A marathon ended in farce in India after the pilot car overshot a turn, forcing the top three runners to take a long detour before abandoning the race – and taking a bus to the finish line.

The leaders, who missed the U-turn at the 16 kilometre-mark (10 mile), ran 4 extra kilometres before officials finally stopped them and told them they had taken the wrong route.

Realising they had no chance of recovering ground, the three abandoned the 42-kilometre race in Bangalore and borrowed money from spectators to take a bus to the finishing line.

North Korean reporters face the fax

North Korea's reporters at the Asian Games in Incheon had to file stories using fax because their web access is restricted in South Korea.

Seoul's Ministry of Unification told the *Korea Times* that North Korean media would not get special access to their country's websites, which are blocked in South Korea.

This meant that fax machines were dusted off and whirred into action as the Games got underway.

Japan baseball game lasts 4 days and 50 innings

In a scenario more usually associated with its cousin, cricket, a baseball game in Japan dragged on for four days with two high school teams slogging it out over a record 50 innings.

Chukyo and Sotoku began their slug-fest on a Thursday in the semi-final of Japan's high school rubber-ball baseball championship in Akashi, western Japan.

But after the usual nine innings in which both teams' pitchers outfoxed all batters for a scoreless draw, the game went into extra time.

At the bottom of the 15th the umpire called it a day and ordered the teams to come back to the field after a night's rest.

For two solid days, batters repeatedly stepped up to the plate only to be dismissed without a single run being scored.

It wasn't until Sunday morning that Chukyo's captain broke the deadlock, walloping a double in the record-breaking 50th inning. That inspired a teammate, who scored one more later in the inning, giving Chukyo a hard-earned 3-0 victory. – *AFP*

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Sport

A look back at 2014's strangest stories
SPORT 54

Formula 1 delivers year of excitement and tragedy

A SEASON of memorable, tense and furious racing was overshadowed by one ferocious intra-team rivalry, a tragic rain-lashed reminder of its dangers and a prolonged financial furore that may threaten its stability.

As Hamilton ended his year as champion, Jules Bianchi remained in a serious condition in hospital after suffering severe head injuries when he crashed in Japan, and the sport's finances and future were the subject of much speculation.

The sale in December of a nose section from a Marussia car, driven by Max Chilton, for 15,000 pounds (US$23,400) in an online auction sale that followed the team's collapse was followed by reports that the sport's commercial owners were struggling to find a leader to succeed 84-year-old ring-master Bernie Ecclestone.

At the same time, after a winless season, Ferrari confirmed more staff departures - including the exits of engineering director Pat Fry and chief designer Nikolas Tombazis -- following a year of unprecedented upheaval that saw two-time champion Fernando Alonso, tempted by a massive salary, departing for McLaren.

Rarely before had the gulf between F1's "haves" and "have-nots" been exposed so starkly as it was in 2014 when the grid was reduced, in Texas, to 18 cars amid claims that a further three teams were in revolt.

The season began in Australian sunshine at Melbourne where a new set of technical regulations ushered in an era of modern hybrid turbo-powered cars that spelled the end of Red Bull's dominance.

In the opening race at Albert Park, Nico Rosberg emerged triumphant for Mercedes after his teammate Lewis Hamilton had retired, but it was the Briton who had the last laugh, securing his second world title with a dazzling victory under the floodlights at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina circuit.

The car of Caterham-Renault driver Kamui Kobayashi of Japan veers off the track during an accident at the start of the Formula One Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 16, 2014. Photo: AFP

In between, the German and the Englishman dominated the title race, mixing raw rivalry with tension and acrimony, and the narrative of a sporting soap opera that saw Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull crash to earth after four successive years as champions.

Vettel's departure to Ferrari and the Renault-powered team's loss of not only horsepower, but more than 60 trophies - some of which were recovered from a lake – after a smash-and-grab raid at its Milton Keynes base summed up their season as much as Daniel Ricciardo's huge Australian smile as he finished third in the title race.

Ricciardo was the year's most improved driver, winning three races - in Canada, Hungary and Belgium - to add some necessary spice and variation to the consistency of Mercedes as Hamilton and Rosberg reeled off a record 16 wins and 11 one-two finishes.

Hamilton's triumph, by 67 points, was the first by a Mercedes driver since the legendary Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio took the title in 1955, and came by dint of sheer determination after a run of setbacks that twice handed the initiative to Rosberg in a roller coaster season.

The biggest flashpoints came at Monaco, Hungary and Belgium as Hamilton and Rosberg, friends and rivals since being paired as teenage karting teammates, battled for glory amid a media focus that exposed their contrasting backgrounds and approaches to racing.

As their differences rose to the surface, the Mercedes team struggled to control their drivers' rivalry, notably in Monte Carlo where they disagreed after Rosberg had run off track in final qualifying and Belgium, following a second lap collision in the race left Hamilton with a puncture.

That led to a team reprimand for the German and, from the following race in Italy, Hamilton seized the initiative to reel off five successive victories that gave him the momentum to take the title.

Of those, one came in Japan where, in torrential rain, Frenchman Bianchi's Marussia car collided with a recovery vehicle and another at Sochi, in the inaugural Russian Grand Prix, where Russian president Vladimir Putin used the event for political ends with a pre-race show of nationalism.

Bianchi was taken to hospital in Yokkaichi where he remained in a critical condition for weeks before he was transferred back to Nice in France to continue his recovery. It was his and his team's last race, the cash-strapped team folding and going into administration with four races remaining.

The Caterham team also went into administration, but returned - with public support via "crowd-funding" - to race in the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix while up "for sale" under its administrators.

Granted a special dispensation to race their 2014 cars in 2015, Caterham's future remained precarious in late December as a buyer was sought. – *AFP*

Myanmar to host 2016 Suzuki Cup with Phillipines

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DURING a meeting last week in Kuala Lumpor, the ASEAN Football federation announced that Myanmar and the Phillipines will co-host the 11th Sazuki Football Cup.

The bi-annual tournament pits the best eight national football teams in the region against one another in a single elimination tournament, with hosting duties usually shared between two states.

The 2016 cup will be the first time either Myanmar or the Phillipines has hosted the tournament, though both have hosted qualifying matches in the past.

No specific dates or venues have been set for the 2016. At the meeting in Malaysia, the AFF board said more details would be decided during the body's next meeting in Yangon this February.

While these negotiations went on, the 2014 Suzuki Cup was wrapping up in Singapore, with Thailand clawing their way to victory in a match with Malaysia.

Like many past Suzuki Cup tournaments, the 2014 cup was beset by widespread reports of hooliganism and general misbehaviour on the part of fans. Malaysian media reported that several men were arrested for brining weapons into the final match on December 22. These arrests came shortly after the Malaysian minister of sports was compelled to issue a public apology after local fans attacked several Vietnamese spectators during a semi-final match on December 7.