



The Best Security for Your Premises

Page - 20



How War Have Impoverished a Nation

Page - 23



The Complaint of the Day

Page - 27



MYANMAR INSIDER

INSIDER NEWS ON BUSINESS, LUXURY, REAL ESTATE, LIFESTYLE & LEISURE

VOLUME 11 - ISSUE 120 - MAY 2024

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INSIDER INSIGHTS

Revenge of the States



Just like in Star Wars Episode 3, Revenge of the Sith, where Anakin Skywalker has turned to the dark side, US lawmakers have moved forward to turn the freedom ...

Page - 10

Braving the 48C Heat to Discover the First Kingdom of Burma



As recent as the first week of April 2024, there was a social media post relating to the hottest cities in the world. Myanmar has the honour of occupying six out of the total 15 positions ...

Page - 18

An Inquiry on Tax



We have been seeing more than our share of deaths and destruction within this beautiful country of ours, so lets spare a little time to lighten up the mood ...

Page - 24



INSIDER ANALYSIS

Silence of the Pigs

Page - 4

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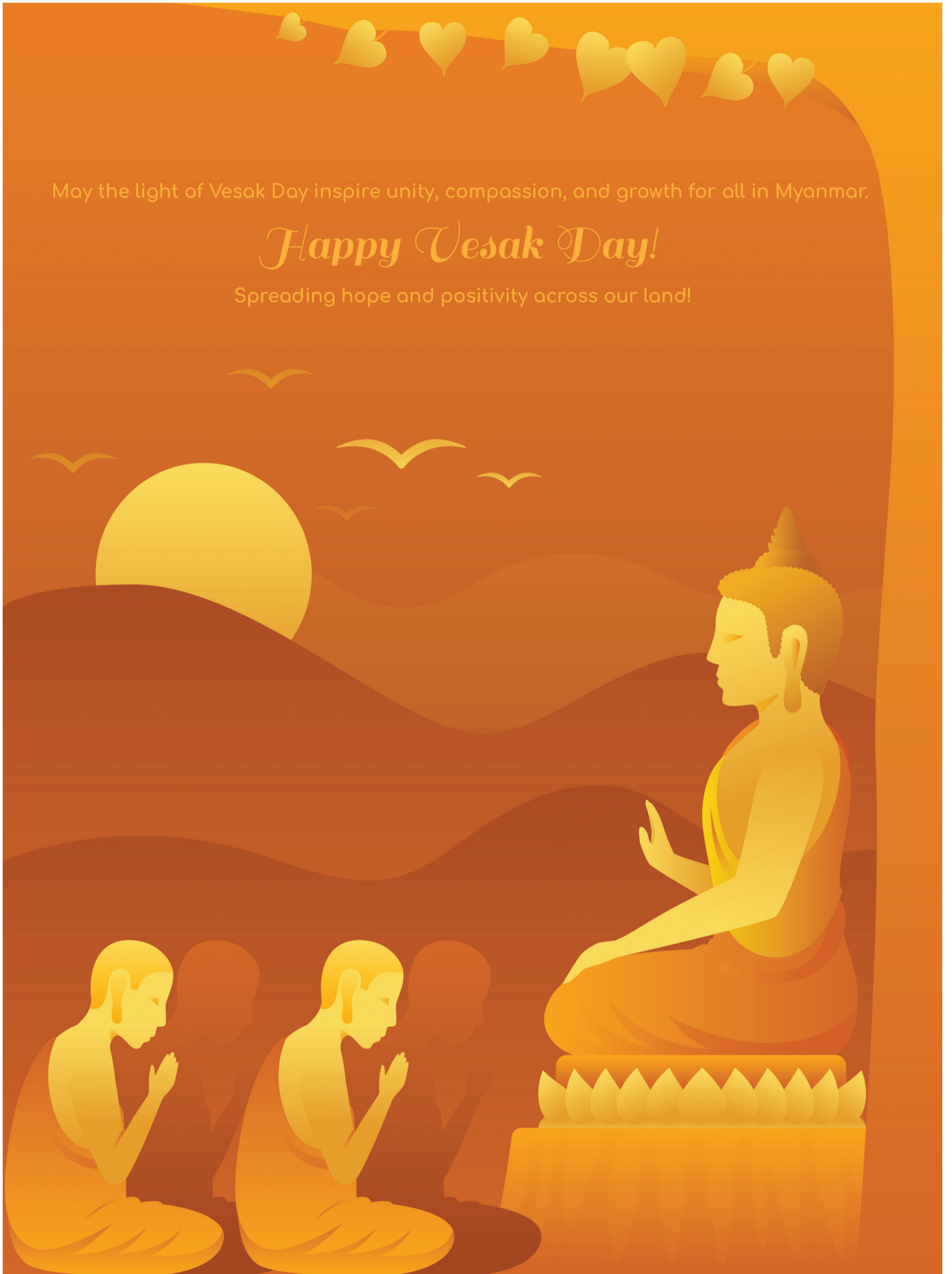




May the light of Vesak Day inspire unity, compassion, and growth for all in Myanmar.

Happy Vesak Day!

Spreading hope and positivity across our land!





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EDITOR IN CHIEF

Jeffery Windsor
editor@myanmarinsider.com

STAFF WRITERS

Charlie Greene
UAC
Tim M Htut
Nelson Tim

CONTRIBUTORS

Nori Lynn (Bethesda)

CREATIVE DESIGN & LAYOUT

Soe Thiha
media8@myanmarinsider.com

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Harry Moe
(+95) 99 7771 7771
media3@myanmarinsider.com

Po Po
(+95) 99 7776 8888
media1@myanmarinsider.com

VIDEO & DIGITAL

Zwe Wint Htet
(+95) 9 988 23 8888
media8@myanmarinsider.com

CIRCULATION

Harry Moe
(+95) 99 7771 7771
imaoffices@myanmarinsider.com

PUBLISHER

U Aye Chan
enquiry@myanmarinsider.com

REGISTRATION NO: 01206

PRINTING

Power Life
Nyan Min Htoo (00263)
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375 Bogyoke Aung San Road, Penthouse,
IMA Building, Pabedan, Yangon
Tel: (+95) 1 376901, 8252573
enquiry@myanmarinsider.com
www.myanmarinsider.com

Dear MI Readers....

Hopefully the hot season would be over soon. With anticipation, everyone is expecting electricity situation to improve. Now that we were about to get to the end of our sweaty days, be prepared to get flooded when the monsoon hits our shores in a couple of months time. To regurgitate the hotness in our minds, why not read our article on venturing out in the first kingdom of Burma, under 48 degree.

Our feature article this month is on Pig Butchering scams, which some of us already lost our money to. By sharing the stories of the victims, we hope that the rest of the people can avoid betting cheated in the most inhumane way online.

Tiktok is hot in the US news. We have an updated reporting on that as Revenge of the States. We did a short interview with Inland Revenue. Hence, our story 'An Inquiry on Tax'.

The flavour of the day has to be super intermittent power supply and we cover it with the 'Complaint of the Day'. With terrorist attacks continuing, our own security is paramount theses days. Hence, the we brought out the best candidates for the task at hand.

Stay safe and stay hungry.

Yours Sincerely,
Jeffery Windsor

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Silence of the Pigs

Charlie Greene

Internet can be a magical place, but it can also be the one where things are always not what they seem. According to E-Commerce Association of Myanmar, many in the country has fallen victims to Facebook sponsored posts (advertisements) scams, where the sellers from border towns such as Myawaddy collected advance payments for (non-existence) goods, defrauding hundreds of buyers of their hard earned cash. Getting an item quite different from what is advertised is one thing, but getting scam of all your cash is hard to take and victims are caught between reporting to an establishment whose law and orders do not instill fear and an embarrassment of being a first-class example of a village idiot.

Unfortunately not every mistake is so benign and it is not news that there are scammers on the internet but you may have noticed that one scam in particular is currently everywhere globally.

A common way that it starts is with a weird text from a number that you do not recognise, e.g., Cindy... can we move lunch to five, when you are certainly not Cindy; or Rick, what

time is our flight when you are not Rick and you definitely don't have a flight booked; or hello is this the manager Joey from the flower shop; or is this Dr John, I'm Emily and is my horse recovering well! Most people would ignore messages like those but there are some kind souls who would respond right back and get sucked into a conversation and eventually, through a process popularly known as Pig Butchering, they can end up losing a lot of money. It's a scam with a striking name that newscasters cannot seem to get over. It's called a Pig Butchering scam and it might sound like a

gruesome name but that's because the amount of money victims are losing is extremely large and painful. First, you feed the pig till it grow bigger and bigger before you finally kill the animal for pork and bones. It is exactly what it sounds like but the name makes a little more sense once you understand how the scam actually works in the world of cyber and counterterrorism threats.

In 2021, special agents from US covering internet scams started seeing this new scam called Pig Butchering. It just refers to raising little piglets fattening them up and butchering them later. Scammers are fatten-

ing up their victim with illusions of grandeur of wealth or love before bleeding them really dry. That is particularly vicious because imagine being a victim of this scam turning on the news and suddenly learning that the small handful people in his or her situation are the pigs.

It might actually an honour to be compared to a pig and if you are thinking well, this seems like the kind of scam that's been around for decades. That is only partially true but the way this one works is fairly new and in the short time that it's been around, it's been massively successful.

Just this year it was at the centre of a huge local news story in Kansas, USA, where it brought down a financial institution. Kansas State Bank Commissioner talked about the massive cryptocurrency scam at the Heartland Tri-State Bank in Elkart; a cryptocurrency scheme that the FBI now referred to as Pig Butchering. Commissioner said the victim was Shan Hanes, the bank's CEO. He is now facing charges of embezzling nearly \$50 million, a loss that caused the bank to fail last August.

To Page - 5

“ But there are some kind souls who would respond right back and get sucked into a conversation and eventually, through a process popularly known as Pig Butchering, they can end up losing a lot of money.”

From Page - 4

According to prosecutors, CEO got Pig Butchered. He sent his scammer the majority of bank's holdings and the bank went under. It is extremely alarming for several reasons; among them is how banks work, because there should be at least one control or monitoring step between the awareness that the CEO gets tricked and whoops, the bank's empty. It's estimated that as of 2022 this scam was taking people for a ride, more than \$3 billion a year in the US alone and that's almost certainly a massive undercount as it only includes people who reported their losses to the FBI. Global figures could be many times that amount.

Why it is easier to fall for than you might think?

Let's start with where this merciless online scam all began. To do that, unfortunately, we do need to go back to the place that no one wants to go - the beginning of Covid. Pig Butchering took off basically at the start of Covid because many of us were isolated and lonely, desperately looking for human contact online. This made us ripe targets. At the same time, organised crime groups from China running casinos in Southeast Asia, were in crisis as thanks to the pandemic, gamblers were not showing up. So these crime bosses turned those casinos into bases for online scam operations and from then on their managers and second fiddler scammers started identifying people and prayed on their vulnerabilities.

Let us walk through the basic steps. The first is to make contact and lure you (the target) in. In one real life example, this woman victim explain how her scammer who called himself Jimmy contacted her at a moment when she was dealing with cancer, the pandemic and the end of her marriage. First communication came as a very innocent message. She said wrong number but scammer came back saying she looked Chinese and asking if she was Chi-

“ There should be at least one control or monitoring step between the awareness that the CEO gets tricked and whoops, the bank's empty.’

nese. She said yes. He said he had moved here just before Covid and then Covid hit and so he was not able to go home and he was a lonely man in need of comfort. Jimmy would message her everyday. She remembered receiving these Emojis with hearts. It was quite flattering for a middle-aged woman to meet a a young man who finds her attractive. Of course that's flattering because scammers are very good at telling their targets what they want to hear most.

One way of making contact is through those wrong number text but experts estimate that they only make up about a quarter of the initial contacts for this scam. The rest can come through sites like LinkedIn, dating apps, Instagram or Facebook places specifically designed for you to meet people that you do not know either for love a hookup. Scammers often research their target using social media where there is a lot of information about people so they can pretend to have something in common.

Another woman victim who met someone on a dating app only to discover that they shared an unexpected connection. He started asking questions about my family and my past experiences. It was a connection that felt even stronger when the scammer told her he came from the same town in China from where she was adopted. They kind of bonded over that. That story started with him asking her questions about her life and ends with her giving him all of her money but regardless of how they start sooner or later we move on to step two turning the conversation toward money.

But even then there's a smart twist

because you will not be suddenly asked to wire money to a Nigerian prince with an obviously fake email or a lottery winning email from microsoft or google. These are so history. In Pig Butchering, there is no direct quest for money at all. Instead an opportunity gets presented to you. Another victim explains the moment when a guy that he met on a dating site started to reel him in. He spent at least a month, daily talking the victim in in cultivating the friendship. Initially the only talk about money was how much his new online (fictional) friend had made in crypto. After all the victim, like most of us, thought he knew how to protect himself from scams 'you can invest with me and I'll make you all this money' and hence, he will not be giving out any money at all. That's when he started saying the big 'NO' - you don't give it to me, you establish your own account and I'll guide you. That's the cleverer hook here; you're not sending the scammer money, they're helping you set up and control your own ac-

count and everything seems more legitimate especially when an app is involved.

When is the last time you took a Grab taxi, and think - oh I am getting into a nondescript car with someone I've never met. I would never do that. But wait, if I can do it from my phone, well in that case, here's my address and particulars. Now you know where I live and that I won't be home for the evening. We are programmed to believe that everything's safe where there's an app involved and the fact the investment is often in crypto can be persuasive for multiple reasons. First, who really knows how crypto works. But people have made money on crypto so it's not unreasonable to think you might meet one of them and they could give you some tips. On top of that, you might not be super familiar with how a trading platform operates or even what one looks like. Scammers have already created incredibly plausible looking platforms which seems to have all the details and functionality of a real one and everyone could be fooled by that. Also some scammers use legitimate apps that allow anyone to build a trading exchange. The problem is there are tools that scammers can use to simulate fake results on those apps while taking your real money.

To Page - 6

“ But regardless of how they start sooner or later we move on to step two turning the conversation toward money.”



From Page - 5

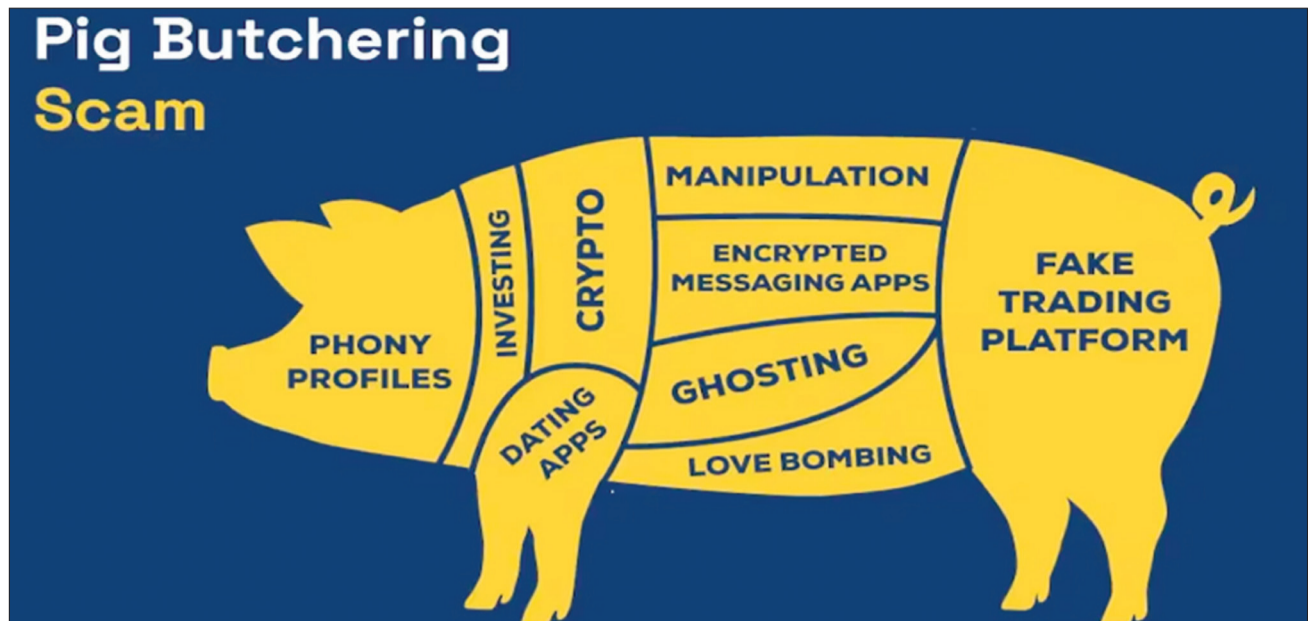
This gave one victim false confidence in Metatrader - it looks just like any kind of normal trading interface that one would use that's available in the Google Play Store. It's also available in the Apple App Store. It's an app that has a lot of good ratings and that was one of the things that made him think that this whole operation was legitimate.

You believed that your investment was making money if you're trading on a legitimate trading interface. You see the profits and losses over time. This is exactly what you saw if your friend told you to download an app and you saw it in the App Store with good reviews, you might assume everything on it was legitimate even before you saw Metatrader logo. Some scammers even set up additional features like two Factor authentication or customer service hotlines.

One woman victim did try her best to do due diligence on the site that she was recommended by the scammer and came away convinced that it was real. There was a legal secretary involved in another state vouching association with a law firm where she was sending her money to. She was real, the victim could verify her so it was very complex and well rehearsed operation. She spoke with a legal secretary and a law firm before sending money and that is more vetting than any of us intelligent people could have done.

At this point of the process things might look pretty good for the people getting scammed. You've sent a bit of money to a legitimate looking site through an account that you control and your new friend's trading tips seem to be working so maybe you send a little bit more and pretty soon you might have a fair amount of money tied up on this trading platform. But when you eventually go to withdraw it, that is where we hit the final step of this process.

Remember that woman mentioned earlier whose online friend claimed that he was from the same town where she was born. She even had convinced her father to invest as well. They had seemingly made a bunch of money and then this happened. By December of last year, their accounts showed a combined balance of \$1.2 million. That's when she decided it was time to cash out



“ These post-Covid scams were being done in former casinos of South East Asia by organised crime syndicates. ”

that's when the site told her before she could withdraw her money she'd have to pay a hefty tax bill of rough \$380,000, That's when she eventually realised something's not right, it wasn't real cryptocurrency investments after all and all her and her father's funds had gone into the scammers pockets - all in all \$390,000 stolen. The tax bill was just the ultimate attempt to squeeze them dry one last time!

This isn't the only brutal story. One woman lost \$350,000, another guy lost \$300,000 and the first woman victim who fell for Jimmy sent him two and a half million, as she was dealing with terminal cancer herself. It is traumatic and it is humiliating and it took extreme courage for those people to come forward.

That is partly why experts think the \$3 billion per annum figure that they have estimated is way too low because most people who've been scammed like them simply do not report their losses out of embarrassment. At this point you have every right to be furious with the people on the other end of all of these messages. You want to see them taken down at the very least.

Who's behind it?

Reasonable people could also fathom that the persons on the other end of that phone (the scammers) might not be the one you should be mad at, because these post-Covid

scams were being done in former casinos of South East Asia by organised crime syndicates. It turned out they are not great bosses after all, as one Indian man named Rakesh recalled. He said he was forced to work for more than 11 months without pay for a Chinese criminal gang. Rakesh said he first flew to Thailand for what he thought was an IT job. Instead he says he was tricked into crossing the border to Myanmar, where a Chinese gangster told him to work or else. He threatened to kill him. The job required Rakesh to spend 16 hours a day on social media with a fake profile targeting Americans. It would be a complete torture to be forced to spend 16 hours a day on social media unless you love it or because you are 15 years old and the algorithm has addicted you to it. A lot of these organisations are using people who've been human trafficked after being lured to these compounds of organised crime under false pretences. People like Rakesh are actually the

victims of a scam themselves basically - they might see job ads for skilled positions as translators or IT specialist in another country. They then go through a whole application process with some going through up to four seemingly legitimate online interviews and fly to their new job, at which point they suddenly learn their new bosses have their travel and other documents confiscated and they now cannot leave.

Back in 2022 Rakesh estimated that tens of thousands of people had been tricked in this way and a more recent UN report estimated that hundreds of thousands of people have been forcibly engaged in this scheme. UN also said most victims are confined to the scam compounds and their screens are always monitored by the members of the organised crime groups. Once they are inside, they have been provided with fake profiles to try and hook people in.

Rakesh found himself acting out as a Russian girl all day every day, using the fake profile of a beautiful Russian girl. He said he needed to scam the people posing as a Salt Lake City based investor named Clara Simonov. Rakesh then flirted online with potential targets. 70 to 80% fall for fake love.

To Page - 7

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From Page - 6

Even after scamming as many people as he possibly can, Rakesh's boss would not let him leave the job.

The whole operation is highly organised and set up to get around the usual ways that you might detect a scam. For instance some organisations generate their own photos for the profile so that they cannot be reverse image searched via google. Employees are given detailed manuals that guide them through every step of the scam process.

They were told to target people who looked wealthy and successful. One advises even on daily activities for scammers - on the first day talk about things like your name age, occupation and hobbies then the next day, talk about your emotional experience with a message divided into two paragraphs and then on the third day, talk about your entrepreneurial experience, etc. They're even given tips on how to break down people's defences. Several of these manuals carefully explain how to build trust and exploit weaknesses in their so-called clients, e.g., be funny, make clients fall in love with you so deeply that they forget everything. The chilling thing is if you're funny enough, you can make people forget a lot of things whether it's common sense internet safeguards, lessons from previous relationships or that they've been accidentally learning about financial fraud and human trafficking for the last twenty minutes. And if you thinking what why don't authorities just shut these compounds down, sometimes they themselves are in on it.

One Chinese man named Lee who was trafficked to a scam centre in Cambodia explained what happened when he did the obvious thing on his second day in captivity. When He emailed the Chinese Embassy he was advised to call the civil police but the police never came. The property management came in-

“ And if you thinking what why don't authorities just shut these compounds down, sometimes they themselves are in on it. ”

stead. They apparently knew that he had called the police. The managers then sold him to another scamming company because he had called the police. The managers of the scam centre said they had to take care of the police with at least \$4,000 and I had to pay for that too. Hence the sale!

The authorities were not going to help him, which actually makes sense when you learn that according to UN estimates Pig Butchering scams in Cambodia brings in an amount equivalent to half the country's GDP which is worrisome because if something generates that much money for a country, you do not shut it down. You spin it off and pray the magic works a second time. The conditions in these compounds can be brutal. That trafficked man took photos of abuse of how some coworkers had been beaten. Even some Facebook videos in Myanmar showed workers being chained to beds at night and being tasered with electric rods when they failed to meet targets or misbehave the slightest.

Lee, who managed to get out of the scam centre now, works to free others. The stories of what he's seen are warning for others and hard to watch such as a man get beaten up very badly he had injuries all over his body. Lee contends it was this man who was reportedly found hanging just hours thereafter. His phone is full of messages from Chinese citizens desperate to be set free from shackles of scam companies. There were also videos of abuses Lee said he received directly from victims inside the scam industry or

found them posted in Social Media Group chats. To say they are shocking and absolutely horrifying would be complete understatement.

And what we can do to protect ourselves and our loved ones from getting scammed in the future?

When you know all of this, it starts to change who exactly you are mad because suddenly the individuals on the other end of the phone do not seem to be having fun sending out messages to scam you. From now on whenever you get a sexy text from a new stranger, good luck not thinking is this a man who was just beaten in a border work camp in autonomous and EAO controlled regions in Myanmar .

We cannot say that every scammer is someone who was kidnapped, tortured and forced to swindle but even if not everyone who is doing this is trapped or coerced, the very fact that many fall into this category, is still a huge problem. What we can do here when it comes to those imprisoned in these compounds is going to take collaboration between international law enforcement agencies. So unless you are the head of Interpol there's not much you personally can do now in wherever country you are in.

Platforms like Facebook should be doing way more to prevent the cre-

ation of fake accounts that target people because it's happening on their watch. Scammers are using sponsored posts. Perhaps the most effective way to stop this from happening is to make it less lucrative by having fewer people fall for it. Awareness of this scam is key. This is one of those rare cases where raising awareness is in itself genuinely useful. Because hopefully you've read here in MI today, this could happen to someone you know. This hasn't just sucked in old people or those who aren't tech savvy. It managed to reel in a bank CEO in the first world country of USA. Everyone has an image of the type of person who susceptible to getting scammed in their heads but unless that image is in a mirror standing right in front of you, you might be wrong.

Thus, as a general rule whenever a stranger online says either I love you or recommends crypto within a month of talking to you, worry honestly even if they do not turn out to be scammers. Those are pretty good red flags to be looking for. It's worth telling your friends and family about Pig Butchering too. If you know someone who's been scammed like this, try to be kind. It is just human to want companionship and it's actually a nice quality to be trusting of people. It sucks that the internet which should be a way to alleviate loneliness can be turned into a tool to exploit it. Maybe if we all look out for one another, we can ensure that the worst mistake anyone ever makes on the Internet might just be inadvertently buying an excellent Christmas tree for something totally different upon arrival. I am quite sure you have all experienced that in life, just like myself.

“ Some Facebook videos in Myanmar showed workers being chained to beds at night and being tasered with electric rods when they failed to meet targets or misbehave the slightest. ”



Security Forces Thwart Terror Attack in Nay Pyi Taw

NNCP terrorists were unsuccessful in their first and probably the last attack on the capital city of Nay Pyi Taw. They had planned to attack important buildings and locations in the greater Nay Pyi Taw area, intended to cause panic among the people through the use of drone strikes. The attacks started around 10:30am on April 4.

Myanmar air defence forces, responsible for security of the air space around the Nay Pyi Taw area, detected the planned attack using advanced warning air defence systems. They successfully intercepted all the fixed-wing aircraft also known as drones. Two of the aircraft exploded in the air before reaching their targets, while the remaining drones were all shot down. Thirteen of the aircraft that crashed to the ground after being intercepted. Among them, four were found to have explosive devices as attachments and had to be safely disabled in a controlled manner. The security forces are currently investigating the other drones that crashed on the ground.

No casualties or damages were reported.



Licences now Mandatory as Pre-arrival Documents



Seeking an import licence for the goods before arrival at the port is obligatory, and failure to do so is subject to a fine and sentence under the existing laws, as declared by the Trade Department under the Ministry of Commerce on April 5.

Without obtaining a permit, no one shall be allowed to export and import the specified goods that need to seek licences.

Whoever violates those prohibitions shall be convicted and punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or with a fine or with both. If a person holding any permit is found to violate prohibitions that one shall be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or with a fine or with both. Any person who attempts to commit or abet in the commission of any offences obtained in the law shall be punished, and exhibits will be confiscated.

Thus, the Trade Department warned the exporters and importers of penalties for non-compliance with the Export and Import Law, directives and guidelines and informed them to seek licences first as pre-arrival documentation for all types of shipment by air, sea and land road.

(Source : GLNM)

Two of Six Endangered Tiger Species in Myanmar

All tigers on earth are already listed as endangered species. There are only six species of tigers that still remain in the wild, yet by a twist of fate, two species among them can be found in the jungles of Myanmar. The existence of these two types of beasts helps promote the concerted efforts of wildlife conservation activities in the country.

There are nine different types of tigers around the world: Caspian, Javan and Bali tigers were now extinct, while the remaining six species reside in 13 countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Cambodia, Russia, China, India, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam. They are Bengal, Indo-China, Malayan, Siberian, South China and Sumatran.

The first of the local two, the Bengal tigers currently inhabit in Myanmar's largest tiger conservation areas: Hukong Valley Tiger Reserve and Htamathi Wildlife Sanctuary. The former refers to the border areas between Kachin State and Sagaing Region while the latter is in the Sagaing Region between Chindwin River and Uyu River.

The second species, Sumatran tigers are can be found in the Ta Nin Thar Yi Region, the southern-most region of Myanmar.

In terms of sizes, the Siberian tiger is considered to be the biggest, living in eastern Russia's birch forests. The Siberian tiger weighs between



over 600 pounds and 700 pounds (~300kg). The second largest tigers (the Bengals) are found in India, Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan, and they weigh between 400lb and 600lb (~230kg). The third largest ones are the Indo-China tigers, weighing between over 300lb and 400lb. South China tigers live in the middle and east of the country, and they are over 280lb and 300lb. The Sumatran tigers are found on the island of Sumatra, and they are over 260lb. Malayan tigers are spotted in the tropical and subtropical moist broadleaf forests of the southern tip of Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia. They are be-

tween 104lb and 285lb.

Around 100,000 tigers were in existence across the world about 100 years ago. With an average kill rate of more than 1,000 tigers every year, by 2010, there were only 3,600 tigers left in the wild.

According to a survey by the Natural Environment and Wildlife Conservation Society, six types of tigers live in 13 countries in Asia. There are 355-500 tigers in Bangladesh, 70-80 tigers in Bhutan, 10-50 tigers in Cambodia, 85-96 tigers in China, 368- 556 tigers in India, 7-23 tigers in Laos, 500 tigers in Malaysia, 35-70 tigers in Myanmar, 121 tigers in Nepal, 300 tigers in Russia, 200-

250 tigers in Thailand and 50-150 tigers in Viet Nam.

The cameras were installed in the Htamathi Wildlife Sanctuary to survey the world's rarest species of Bengal tigers yearly. Win Hlaing, a sanctuary warden, said, "Myanmar boasts Bengal tiger in upper part and Indo-China tiger in lower part out of six tiger species. The camera traps captured about 20 tigers in Htamathi. They might be in Hukong Valley and on Naga Hills. There are certain areas in which we cannot conduct the survey. We should all cooperate to conserve them as a national task as the tiger population declines".

YCDC to Generate Electricity from Landfills



Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) is planning to generate electricity with methane gas released from the final landfills. Yangonites are all waiting to see if this is just NATO (No Action, Talk Only).

Reportedly, the YCDC and Korea's GES Co, Ltd have discussed a plan to purify methane gas from the final landfills with an objective to generate electricity. On April 3, a discussion was held at Chatrium Hotel, between the two parties, to highlight the cooperation of YCDC and GES to work towards purifying methane gas from the final waste dump, and run a generator. A composting process is also underway to reduce the volume of waste due to scarcity of land around Yangon. The volume of waste in Yangon City is increasing year after year. The whole city disposes about 2,500 tons of waste and rubbish per day.



Revenge of the States

UAC

Just like in Star Wars Episode 3, Revenge of the Sith, where Anakin Skywalker has turned to the dark side, US lawmakers have moved forward to turn the freedom of expression to the dark side, with the passing of the legislation to ban the hugely popular social media platform of Tiktok. On March 13, US House of Representatives (Lower House) passed a bill banning app stores and internet service providers from distributing 'foreign - adversary - controlled' applications. The generics may sounds vague, but the target is clearly Tiktok, the platform on which 170 million Americans spend an average of 56 minutes per day. The demographics of user group is predominantly youngsters, aged below 35, the future generation.

In least-developed country like Myanmar, Tiktok is ruled by young and not-so-young girls showing off their individual assets, dancing and bouncing the same style, through gyrating their hips, backsides and oranges, with the fat hope of becoming cele of some kind, where Tiktok will eventually pay them for doing such nonsense. They might be bet-

ter off buying Aung Bar Lay lottery. The probability of getting some returns are far greater in the latter.

But the issue in the US is not only of such girls or boys cele wannabes, but also the rise of Tiktok news. Based on yearly Gallop polls conducted since 2016, the level of trust in mass media and 24 hours reporting of news such as CNN, has been the lowest this year. The viewership has turned to news in social media, including Tiktok. The most popular Tiktok news caster, News Daddy has more than 10.3 million followers, a number far greater than NY Times,

Washington Post and Daily Mail of UK combined. Hence, the dangers of spread of fake news to more than half of US population, if algorithms can be somehow manipulated.

Who would have wanted to manipulated algorithms in such a way! Undeniably Facebook has become world #1 in promotion of fake news, taking down of factual content and at the same time, not paying taxes to the country where they derived their ad revenues. Just think of what's happening in Myanmar in the past three years! Scared of a 'what-if' scenario of the same thing happening

in the USA, perpetuated by Tiktok through targeted algorithms, US government decided to walk the talk by advancing the idea of the platform being associated the Chinese government.

Despite evidence on the contrary and Tiktok denying any Chinese government interference, the LA and Singapore based global video sharing platform, has been subpoenaed to Congress too. Tiktok is a subsidiary of ByteDance group, headquartered in Beijing and incorporated in the tax heaven of Cayman Island. Tiktok has tried defensive manoeuvres including asking its members to lobby congressmen, highlighting that its shareholders include US venture capital and hedge funds and getting Oracle to safeguard US specific data (in hope of averting spying allegations). All efforts went into deaf ears, as politicians try to score points in the elections year and possibly, "revenge of the States" based upon the past treatment of US digital giants operating in China. Take note, all Google services and Facebook are still banned in China.

To Page - 11

“ Myanmar, Tiktok is ruled by young and not-so-young girls showing off their individual assets, dancing and bouncing the same style, through gyrating their hips, backsides and oranges, with the fat hope of becoming cele of some kind, ”

From Page - 10

Fears of Tiktok behaving like Facebook are overblown. There is no evidence of spying. Nor was there political intrusion akin to fake news over Facebook. Other than bias over Gaza coverage, there is no evidence to corroborate that Tiktok algorithms are in line with Beijing. May be the youth demographics of Tiktok users simply like to stay more on the side of 'from the river to the sea', in tune with Beijing purported policy. Tiktok did admit to removal of Tiananmen related videos in the past, probably not to anger Beijing. The lawmakers passed the bill 352 to 65. The so-called Foreign Aid bill proceeded to Senate (Upper House) and passed too. After President Joe Biden signed the bill in April, this law is moving like a speedy Gonzales, giving Tiktok little time for plan B. After the President signed the bill, Tiktok has to shut down US operations within nine months. It either has to become a US owned entity or a public company and cut ties with Beijing, but Chinese government prefers neither. Tiktok shareholders would be at the top of losers list, as a direct consequence of this revenge of the States. Western consumers lose out too, depriving them of alternative platform choices. They may also miss out on the innovations from the Far East, evolved through competition with US digital behemoths. The top beneficiary seems to be the Facebook, whose video sharing service 'Reels' compete directly with Tiktok. Insta,

“ Undeniably Facebook has become world #1 in promotion of fake news, taking down of factual content and at the same time, not paying taxes to the country where they derived their ad revenues. ”

Youtube, X, Snapchat are also expected to gain at Tiktok expense, in that order.

It is impractical just to carve off US operations of Tiktok and sell separately, even if buyers like Amazon

might be keen to snap up the Tiktok shop, that is gaining huge popularity as an alternative e commerce route. Listing the Tiktok as a separate entity might be a possibility, yet a company worth trillions of dollar in valuation might not be an easy float, facing current objections from Beijing.

Whatever the future lies, Tiktok will forever be written in the annals of civilisation and its case of having to shut down in the US will become a case study in freedom of expression vs silencing of competition in the disguise of being an armlet of so-called a foreign enemy.



Hostel Fees Surge in High-Demand Areas

Hostel fees are now rising in some Yangon locations where most workers stay, said the activists advocating for workers' affairs. As reported in the last issue of MI, workers are now caught in between stagnating wages and the hostel rental fees going up north every quarter. "We can't tell the hostel owners not to hike the rate. They have to bear some overhead charges on their part. If they need to repair something broken in the rented hostel, the repair charges have now doubled. Other costs are also increasing because of approaching Thingyan, so they inevitably have to raise the fee. There are many rising costs such as electricity bills and cooking. While the salary is the same with no



increase, workers have to pay more for hostel fees. A room the previously cost 40,000 Kyats has gone up to 60,000 Kyats per month," said a labor advocate.

Monthly rentals range from 40,000 Kyats for singles to 80,000 to 100,000 Kyats for families, depending on the size of the unfurnished room.

Due to ever unreliable electrical supply, people have to rely on firewood or LPG gas for cooking rather than electricity. This adds to the cost of living. Especially if the time when the workers arrive back at the hostels coincides with the time the electricity is cut, they will have to buy gas or firewood to cook, out of their already tight pockets.

Manufacturing Exports Surpassed \$8.8 Bln

The exports from the manufacturing sector crossed \$8.8 billion in the financial year 2023/24, indicating a drop of \$2 billion compared with that of the FY 2022/23.

The finished industrial goods export amounted to \$10.9 billion in the FY 2022/23.

By two modes of transport (sea and land border), Myanmar delivers manufacturing goods to foreign markets.

Myanmar exports agricultural products, livestock products, fisheries, minerals, forest products, finished industrial goods, and other goods, while it imports capital goods, intermediate goods, raw materials from CMP garment factories, and consumer goods.

Myanmar has been implementing the National Export Strategy (NES) 2020/25 in order to bolster exports. The priority sectors of the NES comprise agricultural production, garment and apparel, industrial and electronic device, fishery business, forest product, digital manufacturing and service, logistic service, quality management, trade information service, innovation and entrepreneurship sectors.

(Source : GNLM)



Chinese Investments Propel Myanmar's Garment Industry



According to Sui Xigang, Vice-chair of the Chinese Business Association's Garment Industry branch in Myanmar, China primarily invests in Myanmar's CMP garment industry, which employs over 400,000 local workers.

As of the 2023/24 financial year, Myanmar has over 300 Chinese CMP garment factories, all registered with the Myanmar Investment Commission. "The major investors in Myanmar's garment industry are China, Korea, Japan, and Myanmar. China contributes over 60% of these investments, ensuring industry stability," Sui Xigang stated. "Exports from Chinese CMP factories reached \$3.5 billion in the last financial year. These factories not only produce quality goods but also contribute to the development of skilled labour in Myanmar."

Together with the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association, we showcased over 100 brands and companies from China, Europe, Japan, and South Korea at an exhibition featuring Made in Myanmar garments, shoes, hats, and travel bags, presenting Myanmar's quality products to the global market," added Sui Xigang.

Despite challenges such as foreign currency control, electricity shortages, and fluctuating orders due to European and American sanctions, Myanmar's abundant young workforce, reasonable labour costs, and manufacturing capacity remain competitive advantages not only in Southeast Asia but also globally.

Strong Winds, Hail Expected in Central Upper Myanmar

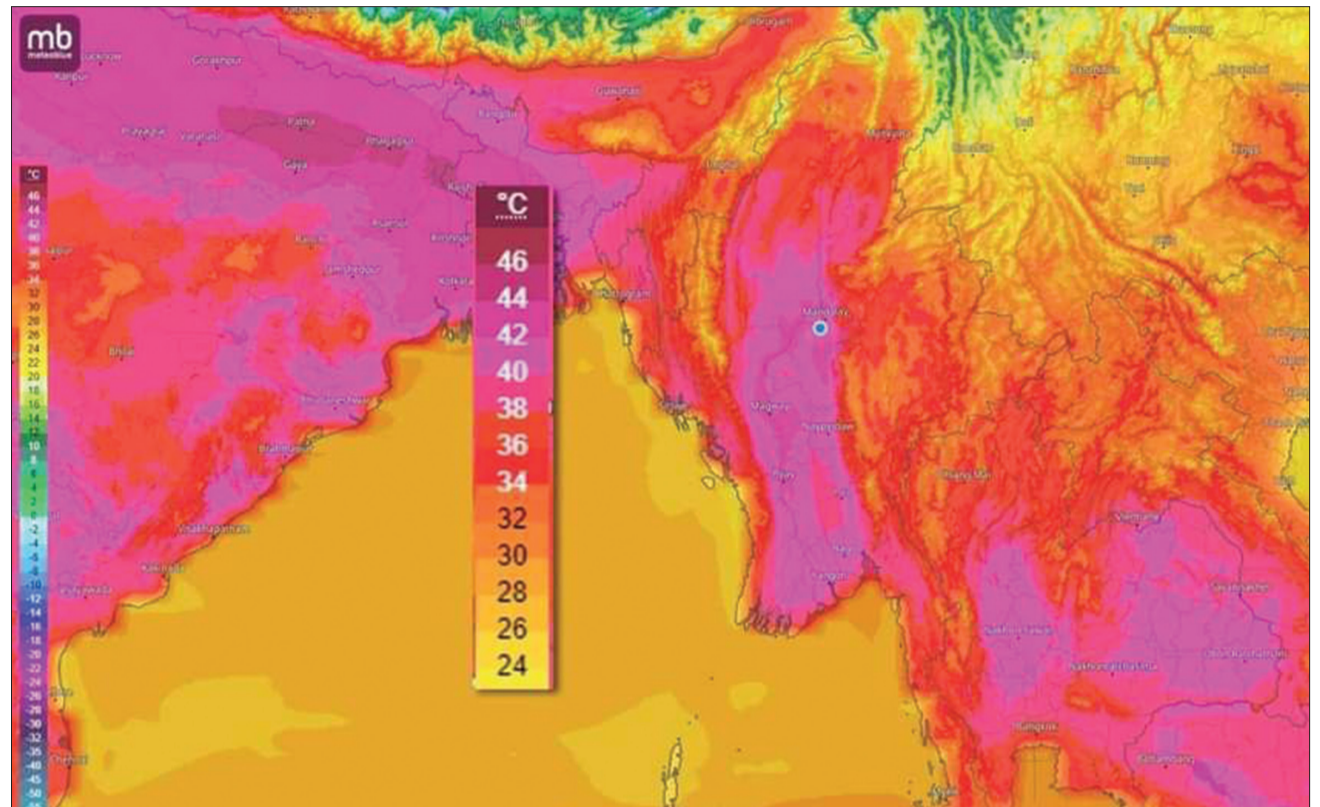
Hla Tun, director of the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology, advised the public to be aware of strong winds and hails in central and upper Myanmar in coming weeks.

According to the weather forecast, these hailstorms and strong winds can happen in early May.

Some incidents have occurred this month, causing damage in some areas.

“The areas to be aware of cover the whole country. People in central and upper Myanmar especially should be careful. Cumulonimbus clouds are strong at this time. After being hot for the whole day, cumulonimbus clouds form from evaporated clouds. It is likely to happen in the evening as the main cause is overheating. It is during April and May. When the water vapour concentration is high, cumulonimbus is strong, and it happens in early May after Thingyan,” said Hla Tun.

Daytime temperatures across Myanmar are forecast to gradually rise during the summer months of



March, April and May. Moreover, under El Niño conditions, thundershowers accompanied by strong winds, hails, thunder and lightning are likely to occur in the afternoon or evening due to the convective

cloud as daytime temperatures gradually rise across the country.

Since difficulties in agricultural and drinking water may arise along with hot weather and El Niño impacts, people reportedly need to follow the

warnings by relevant authorities to use agricultural water efficiently, to use a short-duration, high-yield rice variety, and to select and cultivate a high-yield rice variety with low water requirements.

Myanmar Agri-produce Exceeded \$3.8B



Agricultural exports totalled \$3.83 billion in the past financial year 2023/24 (April-March), according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The figures reflected a drop of \$167 million compared with that of last year.

Myanmar exports agricultural produce, animal products, minerals, forest products, and finished industrial goods through maritime and border trade channels. At the same time, it imports capital goods, intermediate goods, raw materials imported by the CMP enterprises and consumer goods.

Myanmar has been implementing the National Export Strategy (NES) 2020- 2025 in order to boost exports. The priority sectors of the NES include agricultural production, garment and apparel, industrial and electronic device, fishery business, forest product, digital manufacturing and service, logistic service, quality management, trade information service, innovation and entrepreneurship sectors.

(Source : GNLM)

GOVERNMENT

INSIDER

Yangon Faces Further Power Reduction

The Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation (YESC) has announced a week-long decrease in power supply across Yangon. This reduction is necessary due to maintenance work on the natural gas pipelines of the Yadana offshore block.

According to YESC, repair work on the Yadana offshore natural gas pipelines, which supply gas to power plants in Yangon Region, is scheduled from 10 to 17 April.

During the maintenance period, the capacity for power generation and transmission will be reduced. As a result, emergency load reduction measures will be put in place, leading to temporary power outages in some townships in Yangon.



\$2.2 Billion Debt Repaid within Three Years

SAC Chairman announced that government has managed to repay \$2.2 billion in foreign debt in the past three years during March end SAC meeting. He noted that a significant portion of this debt comprised capital loans acquired by preceding administrations. Despite notable GDP growth in the last financial year and positive economic indicators, he acknowledged that the performance of the economy still fell short of expectations.

Stock Prices

Issuer	February 29, 2024	April 30, 2024	% Change
FMI	8,300	8,700	4.82
MTSH	2,900	2,900	0.00
MCB	7,700	8,000	3.90
FPB	1,550	1,450	-6.45
TMH	2,500	2,750	10.00
EFR	1,700	1,700	0.00
AMATA	4,800	4,600	-4.17
MAEX	1,750	2,050	17.14

Exchange Rates

Currency	February 29, 2024	April 30, 2024	% Change
USD	3,600.00	3,920.00	8.89
SGD	2,665.00	2,822.00	5.89
EUR	3,855.00	4,180.00	8.43
CNY	500.00	530.00	6.00
JPY	23.80	24.60	3.36
THB	100.00	105.00	5.00

Fuel Prices

	February 29, 2024	April 30, 2024
95 Ron (1 liter)	2,885 Kyats	2,960 Kyats
Premium Diesel (1 liter)	2,565 Kyats	2,460 Kyats

Gold Prices

Per Tical	February 29, 2024	April 30, 2024
	3,915,000 Kyats	4,770,000 Kyats

BUSINESS NEWS

Thilawa SEZ \$6.2M Increase in Investments

Thilawa Special Economic Zone saw \$6.2 million increase in investment in the 2023/24 financial year compared to the previous year's amount. The zone's current exports

account for 2% of the country's total export volume. It began solar-powered electricity generation in December 2022, with five companies currently involved in this initiative.

The Ministry of Electric Power aims to produce 14MW of solar power within the zone.

A total of 114 companies from 21 countries have invested in this Thil-

awa SEZ, spanning 667.2 hectares (approximately 1,650.139 acres). It is one of the three economic zones in Myanmar and is apparently the most successful.



Upcoming Events

NAME	DETAILS	ORGANIZER	CONTACT INFORMATION
Complast Myanmar 2024	Venue: Yangon Convention Centre (YCC), Yangon, Myanmar Date: 16 - 18 May 2024 Time: 09:30 AM-06:00 PM	Smart Expos & Fairs (India) Pvt. Ltd	office@smartexpos.in
Compack Myanmar 2024	Venue: Yangon Convention Centre (YCC), Yangon, Myanmar Date: 16 - 18 May 2024 Time: 10:00 AM-05:00 PM	Smart Expos & Fairs (India) Pvt. Ltd	office@smartexpos.in
Logmat Myanmar 2024	Venue: Yangon Convention Centre (YCC), Yangon, Myanmar Date: 16 - 18 May 2024 Time: 09:30 AM-05:00 PM	Smart Expos & Fairs (India) Pvt. Ltd	office@smartexpos.in
World Education Expo Myanmar 2024	Venue: MCC, Mandalay, Myanmar Date: 21 - 22 May 2024 Time: 09:00 AM-05:00 PM	Dagon Exhibitions	dagonexhibitions@gmail.com
World Education Expo Myanmar 2024	Venue: The Eravati (former Rosewood Yangon Hotel), Yangon, Myanmar Date: 25 - 26 May 2024 Time: 09:00 AM-05:00 PM	Dagon Exhibitions	dagonexhibitions@gmail.com



Ranking Third in ASEAN for Heritage Parks

Wildlife sanctuaries and national parks control climate change and contribute to the sustainability of biodiversity and peaceful co-existence between human beings and the natural environment. Myanmar now ranks third among the ASEAN countries for possessing many national parks. Not so surprising perhaps, considering Myanmar has the second largest land area after Indonesia and biggest uninterrupted land mass.

Brunei and Laos boasts one ASEAN Heritage Park each, Cambodia and Singapore got two, three in Malaysia, six in Thailand, seven in Indonesia, eight in Myanmar, nine in the Philippines and ten in Viet Nam. The whole ASEAN community possesses 49 heritage parks in all. Accelerating this type of biodiversity conservation can support the sustainability of human resources and environmental conservation.

Myanmar is participating in environmental conservation with ASEAN countries and working with NGOs and locals to develop national parks and ensure the survival of wildlife animals. There are 59 natural protected areas covering 6.4% of the country land areas.

ASEAN heritage parks are defined as “protected areas of high conservation importance, preserving in total a complete spectrum of representative ecosystems of the ASEAN region.”



Ancient Lakes in Bagan to be Restored for Public Use



Excavations and conservation activities were underway at four ancient lakes, to be presented to the public in their original condition eventually, said Kyaw Myo Win, director at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture (Bagan branch).

Following the discovery of four lakes made of ancient bricks that have been used since the Bagan era, research and excavation work was initiated to determine their original expanse. “There are four areas that have been identified as having the shape of ancient lakes. Now, we are doing excavations to determine the width, volume, and depth. After these activities, we will gradually start dredging for research. Then, it will be followed by conservation. We are now working on Oak Lake, Ywa Haung Gyi Lake, Phwar Saw Su Taung Pyae Lake and Yay Taung Muni Lake. If we can restore these ancient lakes, we will create a public destination to show them in their original functions,” he continued.

It is impossible to predict how long it will take to find out the details, and an essential factor is to avoid hasty excavations as these are ancient lakes made of Bagan-era bricks, he added. The department has resumed the excavation of ancient lakes since the end of the Thingyan period, with a focus on the cleanliness of the Bagan zone and the maintenance of pagodas.

MAI Introduces First ATR 72-600



Myanmar Airways International (MAI) proudly welcomed the arrival of its latest fleet member, its first ATR 72-600, at Yangon International Airport (RGN).

This warm reception underscores MAI's unwavering dedication to enhancing its fleet and service standards to meet travelers' evolving needs. With the addition of ATR 72-600, MAI's fleet now boasts 12 aircraft, reinforcing its position as a leading airline in Myanmar. The fleet includes four A319s, four A320s, two E190s, one B733-300F (ACMI basis), and the newly introduced ATR 72-600. This expansion aligns with MAI's strategic network growth and service excellence vision, enabling MAI to enhance frequencies and drive growth to & from Myanmar and the region, offering more affordable travel options as it prioritizes seamless connectivity. MAI currently serves 30 destinations across Myanmar and international routes spanning 11 countries, which will be extended to 14 markets by the end of Q2 2024.

ATOM Celebrates Double Award Win at Asian Telecom Awards 2024

For the second year running, ATOM has secured two prestigious awards at the Asian Telecom Awards, solidifying its position as a leader in innovation and industry excellence. At the ceremony held in Singapore in 29 February 2024, ATOM was honoured with the 'Telecom Company of the Year – Myanmar' and 'Digital Initiative of the Year – Myanmar' awards.

The Asian Telecom Awards, now in its third year, shines a spotlight on telecommunication companies that have distinguished themselves amidst a challenging market landscape, demonstrating resilience and innovation in delivering exceptional products and services to their customers.

This year, ATOM shines as a double award winner for providing Myanmar's best 4.5G VoLTE network, empowering customers with seamless digital experiences, adopting digital innovation to streamline operations, and playing an active role in uplifting communities and fostering positive change.



Nominal VP Made an Exit

SAC has announced on April 22 that VP Henry Van Thio is retiring due to health reasons.

Van Thio was also a VP during Su Kyi's administration. He was reappointed last year to the same position but remained absent from the front lines of the administration, despite holding such a top post.



Braving the 48C Heat to Discover the First Kingdom of Burma

Nelson Tim

As recent as the first week of April 2024, there was a social media post relating to the hottest cities in the world. Myanmar has the honour of occupying six out of the total 15 positions as reported by El Dorado weather. One of these towns included Nyaung Oo, where the ancient city of Bagan is located. The temperature was 48C+. Right in the middle of summer, or the hot season as it is known locally, the strong scorching winds blew, carrying the insufferable heat wave bearing down on anyone brave enough to venture out around high noon.

After looking in on Ngapali and Inlay, we decided to journey up north to the capital of our first Kingdom, the #1 tourist attraction in Myanmar. Albeit being in the middle of summer, we decided to take advantage of the water festival (Thingyan) break and headed to Bagan.

This time, lacking time pressure due to unnecessarily long holidays, we did a road trip. There is the possibil-

ity of driving straight to Bagan from Yangon, but unless you are an energetic young person and your vehicle is equally youthful, it is definitely NOT recommended. It would take more than 10 hours, if you drive within speed limits. Even if you are up to the challenge, your automobile may not hold out against the weather. Hence we decided to take an overnight break in Nay Pyi Taw.

Here we come

From Nay Pyi Taw, its about four

and half hours drive to Nyaung Oo, the town within which the old Bagan resides. After leaving the expressway at Myeik Tee Lar exit, we headed towards Bagan. Our initial fears of encountering PDF terrorists have been proved to be unfounded. The road was reasonably busy. A couple of barbicans en route, with soldiers performing rudimentary inspection on vehicles. Halfway along that road you would pass by the sprawling town of Kyauk Pa Down. The town is famous of many of the

local wares, including the famous potato crisps brand 'Mary Cho'. The township even got an international school, believe it or not!

After that borough, we pass by many speciality restaurants, reasonably large, selling the speciality foods and regional cuisines, including locally produced alcohol made from fruits of the localised palm trees (palm coconuts or dates, perhaps). We strongly suggest you stop by to try out the stuff you have not tried during your lifetime. We did and we did not suffer any side effects, hangovers or stomach upsets.

The Accommodation

As with our usual outings, we decided to stay at Aureum Palace. We have been there two or three times prior during our visits to Bagan in the past decade. The hotel was at full occupancy during the Water Festival.

“ King Anawyahtar of Myanmar surely falls into the same category too. The entrance fees may be small at \$10, but he did look out for future generations. ”

To Page - 19

From Page - 18

Other than the weather, the place is at par with other Aureums in Inle, Ngapali or Putao. Service levels are outstanding too, although I would rate Ngapali as the best among the foursome.

Even before talking about the awes of Bagan, you would be amazed as soon as you entered the reception hall at the Aureum Bagan; more than twenty large teak columns supported the large reception foyer. At least the trees used would have been 30 years old at least. May be in twenty years time, the atrium itself would have become a wonder of Bagan. Large flat planks of hardwood bridged over the koi pond, welcomes you into that concourse while signalling at the same time that the hotel was built without any expense spared.

The villas are also displayed a lavishly constructed style. Some of us

who like to stay indoors and read might find the illumination in the chamber sadly below par.

Not forgetting the good things too; dinner by the pool, immediate BBQ upon order, while being entertained by a local band. You always have the welcoming option to go up stage and express your singing talent too.

Bagan

Every time I visited the Great Wall of Beijing, I cannot help but admire the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang. How farsighted he was to ensure that future Chinese generations continue to prosper, through collection of \$36 (including entrance fees, cable car and toboggan) from every visitors near or far. A similar story can be told of the Khmer King Suryavarman II of Cambodia. His foresight ensures that the current generation continue to collect \$37 from every foreign visitor to Angkor Wat. King Anawy-

ahar of Myanmar surely falls into the same category too. The entrance fees may be small at \$10, but he did look out for future generations.

For our friends from abroad, the four top pagodas and their respective fame in Bagan include Swe See Gone - for hegemony.

Da Ma Yan Gyi - for mass (being big)

Thut Bay Nude - for height

Ananda - for detailed architecture.

Of course, there are other similarly impressive structures in the old Bagan, but if you are short on time or cannot stand the heat, these four are the encapsulation of Bagan history.

Mount Popa

If you come to Bagan, at least spare a day to visit Mount Popa, an hour drive from there, to climb up 3,000 ft high mountain cliff, have a great view of surrounding landscapes while learning about the 37 Nats, the heavenly beings who are so entertained into Myanmar culture. These heavenly beings occupying the realms between the heaven and the earth. Even for the locals, the knowledge of Nats is just elementary. For foreigners it is a topic totally alien, let alone the details of the 37

high powered spirits in esse.

The only disappointment of going to Mount Popa would be because of the fact that you have chosen the shorter route, which shaves off 20 minutes compared to the longer one. Many many years ago, some of the areas around Popa are lepers colonies. Now leprosy is close to non-existent here. Yet along the short route from Bagan to Popa, the beggars, young and old appear at the roadside in unison for more than 10 miles of the roadway. Very unpleasant perhaps, helping me remember movie, 'Village of the Damned'. The government of the Mandalay division should seriously do something about it as this reflects poorly on the country and compromises the feeling of safety for all travellers.

When to Visit

If you really want to undergo the feeling of being in a Philip Air Fryer, April is the month of choice. Else, Bagan is a suitable place to visit any time from June till February. Rainy season does not affect Bagan much as it is in the middle of Myanmar region, where rainfall is miniscule. So what are you waiting for? At least Bagan is waiting for you now!

“Very unpleasant perhaps, helping me remember movie, ‘Village of the Damned’.”





The Best Security for Your Premises

Tim M Htut

Based on our own anecdotal evidence, we have our batteries from our diesel generators, connection wires from them, side mirrors of our car all cut off and stolen during this year, while our security guard was taking a nap, instead of guarding. A couple of years ago, our security guard was found to be selling off our scrap metals from our premises. Prior to that, a thief broke into our house in Bahan area, while our we were on holidays with out canines. CCTV was there but it was no obstacle to a would-be thief.

Especially during the current turbulent times, personal and property security is a consideration for all. Alarm system, cctv, security guard,

which one is the best? Let me suggest an old fashion guard dog.

A large guard dog is a complete deterrence to any would be criminal. Which criminal would seriously want to tackle the house with a man's best friend when face with a choice of a house without any Rover, Fido, Pluto or Goofy? The only disadvantage would be the hound not being vicious on friendly enemies, such as a crooked staff already familiar to him. CCTV might be helpful in such a case. In addition, these guard dogs will protect you at the expense of their life. So feel safe. You'll never walk alone!

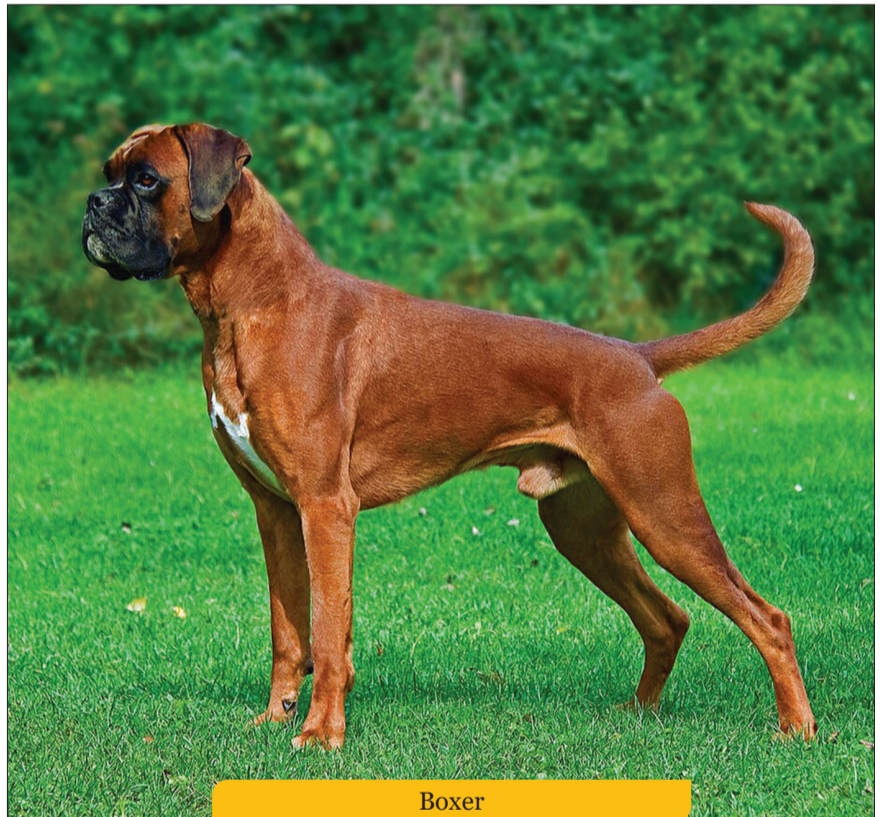
To Page - 21



German Shepherd aka Alsatian



Rottweiler



Boxer



Cane Corso



Chow Chow



Doberman



Belgian Melanoid



Tibetan Mastiff



Akita



Kangal



Dogo Argentino

From Page - 20

Here I am talking about guard dogs only. A lot of pooches are not guard dogs. Golden Retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, Poodles, etc., may just bark to alert, but they would not deter the visiting stranger. Golden Retrievers might even show the thief the place where the safe is kept.

Hence, I compile a list of guard dogs to be of use to all of us.

Just to clarify. Guard dogs are not protection dogs. Protection dogs are trained guard dogs, that has gone through canine protection training to protect you and your family specifically.

To Page - 22



To Page - 21



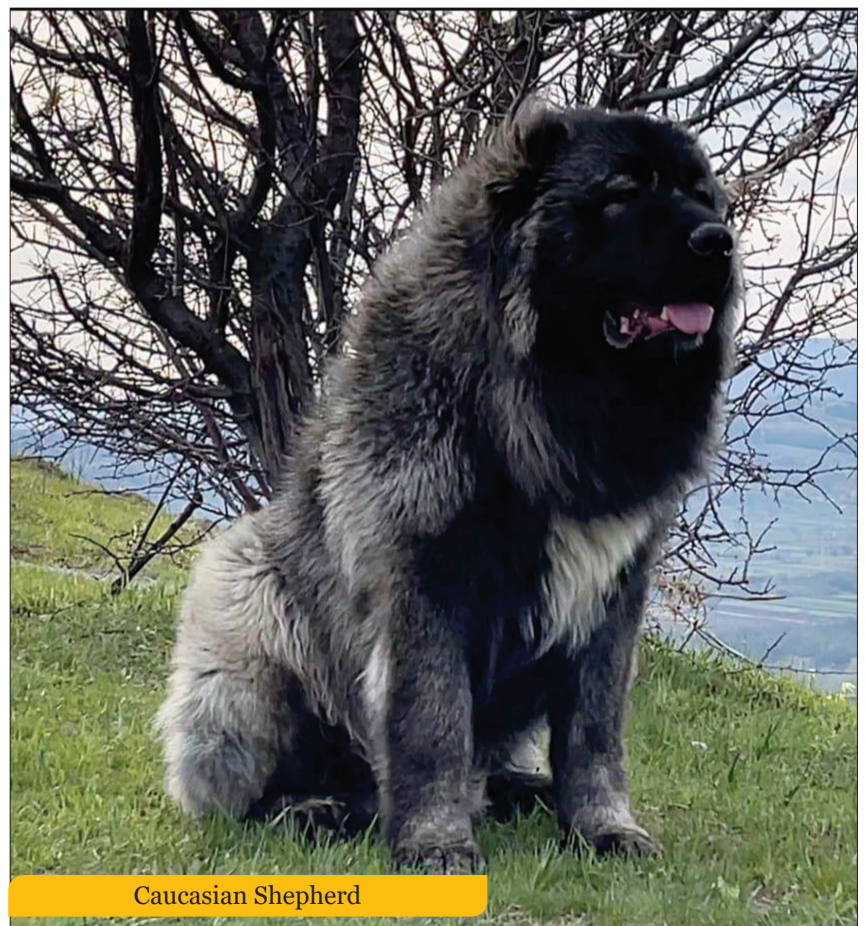
Alabai



Boerboel

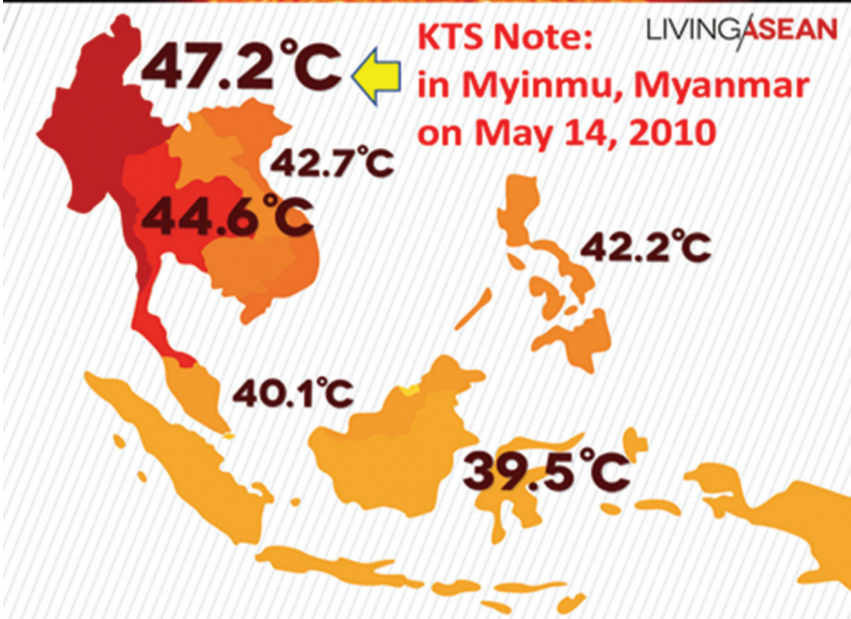


Giant Schnauzer



Caucasian Shepherd

THE HIGHEST RECORDED TEMPERATURES IN THE ASEAN



MYANMAR	47.2°C	LAOS	42.0°C
THAILAND	44.6°C	MALAYSIA	40.1°C
VIETNAM	42.7°C	INDONESIA	39.5°C
CAMBODIA	42.6°C	SINGAPORE	37.0°C
THE PHILIPPINES	42.2°C	BRUNEI	35.0°C

Setting the Record High Temperatures

If you are feeling exceptionally humid and balmy in this hot season, fret not! You are not alone. The whole of South East Asia is experiencing record high temperatures and Myanmar is no exceptions either.

Myanmar meteorological service has announced that seven cities in central region has set historic high temperatures on April 28. They include Chauk (Magway Region), Naung Oo (Bagan area), Sagaing, Ta Dar Oo (Airport area), Taung Dwin Gyi, Mandalay and Zaung To. The recording of temperatures across

the regions started 59 years ago and the temperatures recorded for these magnificent seven represented historic highs since the measurement began.

The recorded temperatures ranged from 48.2C in Chauk being the highest of the lot to 43.1.5C for Zaung To, Bago Region, taking the lowest spot.

Experts are advising people, organisations and governments to plant more trees to counter the effects of global warming in a last ditch effort to somewhat step the rise in temperatures across the globe.

How War Have Impoverished a Nation

Tim M Htut

If someone said war at this point of time, almost all people would have pointed out either Ukraine or Israel-Palestine conflict. And they are proving that wars really impoverish nations.

After two years of war, Ukraine GDP was 73% of pre-war times. Millions have either lost their jobs, or had their pay cut by struggling employers. But walk around any of its big cities and you would hardly know a war is going on. Shops, businesses, cafes and restaurants are still packed and plenty of people are driving fancy cars even now.

However, the war has tripped many Ukrainians into poverty. A World Bank survey last November found that 9% of Ukrainians had run out of food at some point within past 30 days. In March of this year, a think



tank in Kiev, Centre for Economic Strategy, reported that 23% of the people in the capital city of Kiev were suffering from food insecurity. 14% are unemployed.

Yet the effects are not visible at best

because the society in question relies on family safety net. Many old folks in dire needs first rely upon their children rather than turning to the humanitarian organisations and food shelters for help.

War cost money and government having to spend more than it earns, causes inflation. Ukraine reported inflation was 27% in 2022. Pensioners and fixed income earners are left with essentially nothing after paying for food, housing, medicines and utilities. This is a country receiving in excess of tens of billions of funding by EU and US plus somewhat unlimited supply of weapons and ammunition.

Even with the help of half the whole world, Ukrainian economy and its people were hard hit by the war.

Just substitute Ukraine with Myanmar in the paragraphs above and we would all begin to see how the current armed conflict have damaged Myanmar's economy even worse, sans external help of any kind.

Way Ahead of the Curve in EV

Nori Lynn

If May 02 opening of BYD showroom in Central, Yangon were anything to go by, it is an indication of complete dominance of Chinese EVs in Myanmar market right now. With luxury brands such as Mercedes and BMWs being denied imports into the country, and the import of EV cars themselves requiring authorised distributorships, the EV market of the future will undoubtedly belong to China. Toyota may be an old favourite of the locals, Germans and Americans brands may occupy the hearts of the wealthy here, yet 'the past is just a story', as the saying goes.

Not only in Myanmar. On the opening day of nine day motor show, Auto China 2024 in Beijing on May 4, navigating the human traffic eager to get a glimpse of electric wonders on display required as much tenacity as negotiation the capital's gridlock roads filled with majority EVs. And the Chinese are edging out foreign car brands that once dominated the China market. They are launching new models more quickly, much more cheaply than rivals from abroad.

The only thing that could slow China EV industry



breakneck expansion seems to be a brutal price war being waged domestically. In the first Q, Tesla has contributed to steep price cuts for falling sales and lower profits. BYD itself reported a big miss on revenues compared to forecasts, as deep discounts kicked in, even though the volume was up compared to last year.

For potential buyers of EVs in Myanmar, don't get

too excited yet. In a heavily controlled trade environment, the offers of concessions by the Chinese EV manufacturers would most likely end up being pocketed into Producers' Surplus instead of getting pass onto the consumers. No wonder the showroom was so vibrant and grand with vehicles aplenty. A stark contrast to Mercedes showroom along Pyay Road perhaps.

Green Turtle Lays Most Eggs along Myanmar's Coast

Green Turtles remain the predominant species laying eggs along the coast of Myanmar, even though the country operates three sea turtle conservation sites aimed at protecting five species of these animals along its coast, where the turtles come every year to lay their eggs, said Phone Maw, the head of the Tha Mee Hla island sea tur-

tle conservation camp in Nga Pu Taw Township, Ayeyawady Region.

Three sea turtle conservation centers are located in Kadon Kani of Bo Ga Lay Township, Tha Mee Hla island of Nga Pu Taw Township in Ayeyawady Region, and on Laung Lon Island in the Ta Nin Thar Yi Region. Among them, Tha Mee Hla island

remains one of the few islands in the world where sea turtles, considered rare globally, come to lay their eggs every month, regardless of the season. There are only seven species of sea turtles worldwide. Among them six species were found in ASEAN waters and five species in the Myanmar.



An Inquiry on Tax

UAC

We have been seeing more than our share of deaths and destruction within this beautiful country of ours, so let's spare a little time to lighten up the mood by dwelling onto the tax system and some of its stats. Spoiler alert: you be surprised! Typical five features of a good tax system include fairness, adequacy, simplicity, transparency and administrative ease. Let's bring all these down to earth in Myanmar. MI has spoken to IRD (Inland Revenue Department) to get ourselves updated on current issues of the day.

The good features are all here?

Fairness refers to the tax system treating all tax payers equally and consistently. People and businesses would pay their fair share of tax and income should be subject to tax only once. Yet fairness as defined by whom? Some businesses and individuals in states and regions outside of central government control end up paying some sort of protection money to EAO, rebels or NNCP terrorist groups. Some restaurants

in major towns and cities are still evading the payment of 5% commercial tax, by either refusing to issue receipts or asking patrons to fork out extra for the shop having to stick stamps onto receipts.

Among the three siblings of regressive, proportion and progressive taxes, most of Myanmar taxes are not progressive in nature yet, resulting from inability to accurately assess one's income or wealth.

Tax collections are not adequate either at present. We are running budget deficits for nine out of the past fifteen years. The country is

grossly short on infrastructure to supply basic services.

Simplicity is one area that Myanmar tax system can be proud of. This could be as a result of lack of advancement in the economy and the financial system. E.g., most of the taxes on transactions such as properties or cars, are simply based on the value of the property and applying a fixed percentage of tax. The value of the property is also only officially determined for tax purposes. There is also no centralised transaction register either. Fat hope for those wanting to do a valuation

report of any property here.

Transparency refers to tax payers and citizens ability to learn of how the money collected from them was distributed. Tax payers being clear on exemptions, deductions, tax credits, etc. Since 2021, the transparency has somewhat done down, based on disclosure of spending and allocations by the central government. At the ground level, we also need transparency as lack of it encourages corruption across all civil services. A good example would be the change of ownership titles for farmland. Without transparency and publicity thereof on fees structure, citizens ended up having to cough up whatever amount demanded by civil servants, just for the latter to do the job they get paid for by the government.

The last of the lot, the administrative ease, refers to both the collectors and tax payers. The system itself cannot be cumbersome or expensive.

“Simplicity is one area that Myanmar tax system can be proud of. This could be as a result of lack of advancement in the economy and the financial system.”

To Page - 25

From Page - 24

At present, due to different registration requirements of various government departments, citizens, business owners and companies are given a run around having to register at different places, do to different departments, etc. There is also the issue of frequent change of tax collectors and assessors, requiring the tax payers to restart the whole process from the beginning.

Here comes interesting stats

In terms of evasion of commercial tax, the government has taken action at least 884 times in the last financial year. Fines have been imposed depending on the frequency of offence, totally 980 million Kyats. Yet, it still represented only 0.03% of the total commercial tax collections of the year.

Out of 283 branches of IRD across the country, only 4% falls under SAS (Self Assessment System). Yet collection wise, offices under SAS collected 80% of the taxes. The moral of the story seems to be to trust the tax payer instead of the tax collectors. Most countries have also done away with OAS (Officer Assessment System) too.

There are many hotlines, branches and emails to ask for details on the taxes and clarify thing, yet, disagreement of the assessment can only be via a written correspondence to the Director General of IRD.

The surprising finding on our inquiries was the fact that there has not

“The surprising finding on our inquiries was the fact that there has not been any reduction in tax revenues collected after 2021.”

been any reduction in tax revenues collected after 2021. Yes, there was reduction during Covid period, but

not thereafter. Saved by the SAS perhaps.

Legal systems, integration issues

and high level push is lacking to ensure that Myanmar has one unique id number for every individuals and entities that could be used for ALL government departments. This centralised registration system is still not in place yet.

Last but not least, the issue of Facebook getting all ad revenues out of Myanmar based companies, targeting Myanmar consumers and not paying any income tax here, is unlikely to be addressed at any time soon. Meanwhile Myanmar continues to lose out on its share of tax revenues.



Yangon - Maw La Myine Trains Suspended after Terrorist Attacks

Train services on the Yangon - Maw La Myine - Yangon railway line have been temporarily suspended after a goods transporter was hit by a mine planted by terrorists between Thein Seik and Don Wun stations. According to the latest update from Railway department of MOTC, the damage has been repaired and the regular services are being resumed from the end of April.

The NNCP terrorists have been targeting public infrastructure from day one in the pretext of fighting the present administration and railway lines have been their targets of late, attempting to disrupt people and businesses from their daily activities.



Another Day Another Terrorist Attack

In less than one week after the repairs were completed for Yangon - Maw La Myine rail route post a terrorist explosive device detonation, a dual purpose bridge serving both the old highway and the rail track was blown off by the NNCP terrorist groups again.

It happened on May Day early morning at 05:15 in the Bago region near the town of Ka Nyut Kwin, causing the derailment of the engine and three other locomotive compartments. All the delivery trucks and heavy vehicles plying this old Yangon - Mandalay highway were also jammed up at the point of reporting, as it affected the bridge between 117 - 118 mile marker. It is not know if the government would allow these heavy vehicles to use the new expressive temporarily. All heavy vehicles and motor cycles are banned from using the new expressway, under normal circumstances. According to government stats, since February 1, 2021, there have been a total of 131 incidences of terror attacks on the whole rail network, including the station and personnel.



Five Cities with Unhealthy Air



Survey on air quality across the country showed a very unhealthy level of pollutants in five major cities of Mandalay Region and Shan State (East) in March 2024, according to the Environmental Conservation Department. The Department measured the air quality at 13 sampling points of Nay Pyi Taw Council Area and 13 regions and states in order to assess air quality at regular intervals.

The particles in sizes of 2.5 microns are spreading in the air in five major cities, namely Amarapura, Aungmye-thazan and Patheingyi townships in Mandalay Region and Tachilek and Kengtung townships in Shan State (East).

The department stated that air quality may change depending on conditions such as temperature of the atmosphere, wind speed, wind directions, moisture, rainfall, use of vehicles, emission of smoke from industries, and environments around the measurement of air quality.



The Complaint of the Day

Nelson Tim

For everyone residents of major cities and towns, the complaint of the day has been increasingly worse supply of electrical power to their houses and businesses. Especially during the last week of April, inhabitants of Yangon have to put up with

less than two hours of supply without interruption. People are getting fed up with this issue and some are coming out with creative ways to keep themselves cool in the midst of the summer. A few youngsters whose houses has no power or air

conditioner has resorted to riding air conditioned buses round trip the whole day and conduct what they need to do while being on an air con bus. A lot ended up wondering why the government cannot resolve this simple electricity supply issue.

Many are frustrated that countries that are a lot less well to do than Myanmar can have 24 hour electricity supply.

The government has highlighted two causes; the terrorist attacks on electrical infrastructure and lower water levels in the dams used for hydro power generation. It stated only 50% of the full capacity can be supplied at present. Out of that total generated, 46% goes to Yangon region, 16% to Mandalay and 38% to the rest of the country.

In terms of power sources, the possible supply total remain at 7,184 MW, comprising of the followings:

Hydro	29 Plants	3,228 MW
Gas	27	3,638
Coal	2	138
Solar	6	180

Even though the numbers at full capacity exceed the yearly demand of ~5,500 MW, at current 50% capacity, the supply remains well below demand hence exacerbating the already worsening situation of fuel and electric power shortage across the nation.



Bridges of Mya Waddy - Maesot Crossing Reopened

After the temporary seizure of Mya Waddy border town and surrounding areas by NNCP terrorist groups, Tat Ma Taw (Myanmar military) has managed to recapture the town and bordering areas by the end of April. As a form of normalising of affairs, the two friendship bridges between the border towns of Mya Waddy and Maesot, Thailand has been reopened and normal trade resumption is expected to follow suit.

Traders and residents are hoping for reopening of Asia Highway that connects Myawaddy to the town of Kor Ka Rate in less than an hour. Currently, due to security concerns, all vehicles have to use the mountainous bypass road, named Htoe Kaw Koe, controlled by EAO and terrorist groups, resulting in excessive 'toll' fees for the transport of goods.



Earthquake Near Myit Kye Narr

4.5 Richter scale earthquake strike 43 mile north west of Kar Mine town in Kachin State on April 29, 03:15. The shaking was noticeably felt in the nearby towns of Myit Kye Narr, Phar Kant, Moe Kaung, etc.



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HOANG ANH GIA LAI MYANMAR COMPANY LIMITED
A MEMBER OF THACO GROUP

192, Kabar Aye Pagoda Road, Bahan Township, Yangon
 +95 1 934 55 66 ~ 68

www.haglmm.com

✉ leasing@haglmm.com



Hotline:

09 785 559 678