

# Los Angeles Times

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## Brown enlarges his bullet train role

With the foundering project at a critical juncture, the governor puts his people in key positions.

RALPH VARTABEDIAN AND DAN WEIKEL

A surprise shake-up of senior leaders at California's bullet-train agency this week was partly Gov. Jerry Brown's response to a growing crisis of confidence and credibility in recent months that has threatened the political viability of the project.

As criticism of the project has intensified, Brown has moved to exert more direct control, installing two representatives on the board of the California High Speed Rail Authority and, on Thursday, playing at least a peripheral role in replacing the authority's chief executive, Roelof van Ark. Several state government sources said Van Ark, an engineering manager and high-speed rail expert, had become personally frustrated and lost the confidence of some key legislators.

Brown is under pressure from unions, engineering firms, big-city mayors and the Obama administration to stabilize and press ahead on a nearly \$100-billion project that would be the biggest in California's lofty history of extraordinary public works gambles. With so much at stake, Brown is putting his own people in charge, although their ability to quickly reverse the damage of a wave of negative outside reviews of the project remains unclear.

Van Ark is leaving in two months, giving the governor and the state's High Speed Rail Authority board little time to find a qualified replacement at one of the most crucial junctures in the project's history. In coming months, the rail agency must complete two crucial environmental reviews, ob- [See Train, A15]



NYEIN CHAN NAING European Pressphoto Agency

**POLITICAL PRISONER** Nay Phone Latt gets a hug from his mother after leaving prison in Pa-an. President Obama called Myanmar's release of 651 prisoners "a substantial step forward for democratic reform."

## U.S. restores ties with Myanmar

Move is a reward for reforms, but Obama is also eager to head off Chinese sway in the resource-rich nation.

PAUL RICHTER REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

SIMON ROUGHNEEN REPORTING FROM BANGKOK, THAILAND

MARK MAGNIER REPORTING FROM NEW DELHI

The Obama administration restored full diplomatic relations with Myanmar, moving swiftly to reward the military-backed government for reforms that include a cease-fire with ethnic insurgents and the release of political prisoners.

The move Friday came only six weeks after Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton made a historic visit that highlighted Washington's attempts to re-engage with a strategic Asian nation that remains under strict sanctions for its dismal human rights record.

The White House was eager for rapprochement

partly to pull the resource-rich country out of China's political and economic orbit.

Clinton flew to the capital, Naypyidaw, shortly after President Obama announced a "pivot" in U.S. military and diplomatic policy to reassure allies in the Asia-Pacific region who are nervous about China's increasing assertiveness.

Diplomatic relations with Myanmar were kept to a minimal level over the last two decades but were never

severed.

The administration now will send an ambassador to the country for the first time since 1990, and it invited the Myanmar government to send an envoy to Washington.

On Friday, Obama hailed Myanmar's progress on several fronts, especially the announced release of 651 prisoners. Although U.S. officials could not confirm the total, or the identities of those released, they said it

included some pro-democracy leaders who had languished in prison since authorities in Myanmar, which is also known as Burma, crushed peaceful anti-government protests in 1988.

In a statement, Obama called Friday's release "a substantial step forward for democratic reform."

"Much more remains to be done to meet the aspirations of the Burmese people," he said, "but the United [See Myanmar, A4]

## CHARGE FILED IN JAIL BRIBERY CASE

As part of a federal investigation, a former sheriff's deputy admits smuggling contraband to an inmate in L.A.

ROBERT FATURECHI AND JACK LEONARD

Federal prosecutors filed their first criminal charge in the ongoing investigation of deputy misconduct in the Los Angeles County jails, saying that an ex-guard has agreed to plead guilty to felony bribery and is cooperating with the FBI.

The case involves former Deputy Gilbert Michel, who admitted smuggling a cellphone and other contraband into Men's Central Jail last year for an inmate who promised him a total of \$20,000. Michel, 38, didn't know that the inmate was an informant helping the FBI and that the person who eventually handed him money was an undercover agent.

Federal officials on Friday declined to detail the information Michel has provided. But the Sheriff's Department has acknowledged that Michel implicated several other jailers in "improper" uses of force against inmates. Michel spoke to investigators at least twice over the last few months, beginning in September, according to court papers.

U.S. Atty. Andre Birotte Jr. said Friday that the investigation into alleged brutality and other misdeeds by L.A. sheriff's deputies is continuing. The FBI probe has looked into claims that deputies carved racist initials into one inmate's head and broke the jaw of another inmate, among other allegations.

"Obviously it's important that corruption and any criminal misconduct in any law enforcement agency get rooted out, not just for public safety but, frankly, for the sake of the organization," he said.

Discovery of the smuggled cellphone by sheriff's officials sparked tensions between the department and the FBI last year. Michel's involvement in the federal sting was first reported by The Times in September and helped spark intense public scrutiny of how the Sheriff's Department has managed the nation's largest jail system.

Sheriff Lee Baca initially [See Bribery, A12]

## Film splits British aisles

A generation after Margaret Thatcher left office, Streep's 'Iron Lady' brings an old divide back to life.

HENRY CHU REPORTING FROM LONDON

The face peering from the ads and posters belongs to Meryl Streep, but the shadow that hovers over the land is definitely Margaret Thatcher's.

The reaction to the film "The Iron Lady" has illuminated just how polarizing "Mrs. T." (or "TBW" — "that bloody woman") remains a generation after her ouster from 10 Downing St.

Love her or hate her — and there are plenty of people on both sides — it seems that hardly anyone here can watch the movie without their personal feelings entering into it.

Put Sam Fogg in the "hate" camp.

"It's not possible for anyone who's lived in the Thatcher era to see it objectively," the 57-year-old art dealer said after a recent screening in London. "I



JUSTIN TALLIS AFP/Getty Images

**A WORKER IN LONDON** carries a poster promoting the movie "The Iron Lady," starring Meryl Streep as the controversial onetime British prime minister.

didn't like it — it was a hagiography.... It didn't show a lot of her economic and social policies that turned the country into the selfish modern England we live in now."

The film, which features Streep as Thatcher in a bra-

vura performance as Britain's only female prime minister, is stirring up extra passion because it offers the British a look at their past just as they appear to be repeating it. [See Thatcher, A8]



Anne Hathaway as Catwoman in "The Dark Knight Rises," Warner Bros.

## THE YEAR IN MOVIES

CALENDAR

### France loses coveted AAA credit rating

Standard & Poor's also downgrades eight other Eurozone countries in a sign the continent's debt crisis may linger. **BUSINESS, B1**

Complete Index ..... AA2  
Weather ..... AA6  
Home ..... E1-E10

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MARC LIFSHER REPORTING FROM SACRAMENTO

California building contractors were thrilled when waterless urinals came on the market, thinking the devices would save them a fortune in plumbing costs.

The state building code would need to be changed, but that seemed an easy sell.

The fixtures would prevent billions of gallons of water from being wasted, and California's environmental lobby could be counted on as a powerful ally.

There was one hitch. His name was Scott Wetch.

Wetch is a Sacramento lobbyist for labor unions, and urinals without water pipes would not be good for his clients in the building trades.

His campaign to derail the bill shows why he is considered one of the shrewdest operators in the Capitol.

First he played the health card, arguing that men's rooms would become breeding grounds for pestilence and toxic vapors.

Then he took a more direct approach, reminding Democratic lawmakers that the bill threatened a key constituency — labor — and spe-

cifically his client, the California State Pipe Trades Council and its 30,000 plumbers and pipe fitters.

Finally, he splintered his opponents by crafting a compromise designed to appease environmentalists. The revised bill, signed into law in 2007, allowed developers to install waterless urinals. But they would still have to install the pipes, just [See Wetch, A14]

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