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## May 15<sup>th</sup> 2023 / Trimester Report I / January – April 2023

Dear friends,

Unfortunately, the situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate and I am forced to repeat the sentence used in my last reports: *«Life at Light of Love and Lei Thar Gone remains extremely challenging because of the frightful economic, political and social situations that the entire country is forced to endure.»*

With each passing day, I am reminded of how privileged we are here in Europe (for some readers - in the USA/Australia) to be living in countries where we - for the most part, experience stability, justice and economic security. This is not so in Myanmar! The second anniversary of the military coup has come and gone and irreversible damage is still being inflicted on the country and its people daily. Yesterday's headlines proclaimed **«Myanmar Power Shortage Leaves Millions at Mercy of Searing Summer»**. Furthermore, the meteorological department forecasts this will be Myanmar's hottest year on record! In the absence of electricity, people are longing for the rainy season to bring relief from sweltering summer temperatures and from water shortages.

For those who are interested in a more in-depth view of the current situation, here a few links to relevant articles:

<https://news.sky.com/story/land-of-fear-inside-myanmars-military-regime-12794386>

This is a link to an article sent to me by Sonia Muir, an Australian friend who, together with her husband Gordon, volunteered for a year at Sanon, the Restaurant Training Project in Bagan.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/the-world-myanmar/australia-deeply-concerned-over-myanmar-junta-summons-for-sean-turnell.html>

This is a link to an article about Sean Turnell who was economic adviser to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi before the coup and was jailed for 650 days.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-at-war-with-own-people-un.html>

This is a link to an article from the UN Human Rights Office, which states «Geneva, Switzerland — Myanmar's military rulers now see civilians as their adversaries and are making war on the country's people, undermining their ability to live, the United Nations said on Friday.»

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-juntas-new-electoral-law-condemned-as-death-knell-for-political-parties.html>

This link explains the new «Political Parties Registration Law» passed in January, which had led to the dissolution of 40 political parties, including the popular National League for Democracy (NLD) (ruling party of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi)

Nevertheless, I repeat the observations made in the last reports: Life goes on, there are still positive & happy events to report **and it is now more than ever important to hold on to the hope of a better future!**

- Light of Love was open until March with all day classes, bus transfers and wholesome lunches for the children. Currently the school is closed for the summer break and will reopen on June 1<sup>st</sup>.
- On February 1<sup>st</sup>, the second anniversary of the coup, there was a nationwide silent strike, the loudspeakers from the pagodas were off until 4pm and only 14 students attended classes at LOL.
- I was especially pleased to receive the good news that my «Myanmar daughter» Khaing Mi Mi San who graduated from LOL and has been working there as an assistant teacher, was accepted for teacher training (Batch 15) at **Pyinya Sanyae Institute of Education (PSIE)**, joining Zoe in Yangon. Her training began on January 9<sup>th</sup> with IT classes. She is the 6<sup>th</sup> student from LOL (including Zoe) to be trained in Yangon!
- The first three trainee teachers from LOL are currently receiving a month-long reinforcement training before they will be placed in new schools for their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of practical training. They are learning a great deal and are well on the way to becoming competent and capable teachers, pedagogically trained to a high standard.
- PSIE offered to hold a SUMMER CAMP at LOL. Zoe and her colleagues enthusiastically planned the camp – a wonderful opportunity for fun during the school holiday and a great chance to learn new things for the 86 children chosen to attend.
- The camp took place from March 9<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>. Five subjects were taught: Maths, Arts & Crafts, English, PE (physical education/sports) and Life Skills. Zoe was assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grades, together with one senior teacher.
- The camp was compulsory for all LOL teachers who, by attending, gained insight into modern teaching methods. They were interested in the new methods and some even requested the PSIE teaching materials from the senior teachers. The camp was therefore a real blessing, because the LOL teachers were able to see how lessons were taught and activities prepared, how the children participated and how the methods influenced the children's actions, reactions and overall behaviour. This was a valuable experience, much more convincing than just hearing about a new method without being able to relate to it.



Here the team of enthusiastic young teachers who taught at the camp (Zoe is 3<sup>rd</sup> from the left)





Having young male teachers was especially valuable for the boys – they were respected by the students and were appreciated as role models.



Attentive students...





The realization that learning can be fun was a new experience for many of the children!



Quiet activities, such as reading and playing board games was also a new experience for many!





Games, especially board games such as Rummikub and Taboo promote the children's ability to concentrate as well as their cognitive perception.



A freshly cooked, healthy lunch was a welcome addition to the daily program!



Students and teachers, a harmonious and happy group.



The final day of the camp was special – in the morning a «spelling bee» competition was held, afterwards, was a small official closing ceremony. In the evening, the children and teachers were treated to a BBQ – another first for everyone. The ladies who do the cooking prepared all the skewers, assisted by the teachers. It was a wonderful evening with mixed feelings of happiness and sadness – most of the children cried when the PSIE teachers said good-bye!



After the camp, Zoe and the other teachers returned to Yangon, where they spent three days evaluating the camp. This included group presentations that all teachers, trainees and the new «Batch 15» students attended, as well as individual reflection and personal evaluation. Zoe for her part was satisfied with the course of the camp over the weeks. She saw changes in the children – they actively participated in the lessons, learned to ask questions and give reasons. They were asked, for example, to explain the «WHY» of their answers. **This is a huge contrast to the customs and culture of Myanmar where basically nothing is ever questioned** and the children are used to **rote learning** - the process of memorizing information based on repetition. Anyone who has ever visited Myanmar can confirm hearing the endless singsong chants when walking past a government school. So, the focus on **meaningful learning**, which involves understanding how all the pieces of an entire concept fit together, is a huge step forward for students and teachers at LOL.

#### EXCITING NEWS JUST RECEIVED:

This **positive momentum** will continue into the new school year! The three young PSIE teachers who taught at the camp will return to Yenangyaung for the new school year. AND besides that, two Light of Love graduates (Hnin Htet Htet Naing (known to many as «Rihanna» and Cho Cho Tun) from the first group to receive training in Yangon, have been assigned to LOL for their second year of «in-service-training» which will bring the total of PSIE trained teachers at LOL to the all-time high number of FIVE!

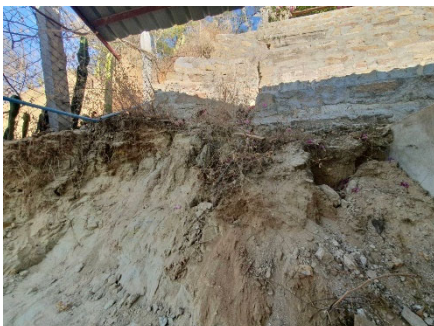
### Meanwhile at Lei Thar Gone Guest House

- As with LOL, the situation at the Guest House still remains very challenging – mainly due to the absence of guests, otherwise said – the absence of income.
- The Thingyan Water Festival in April, which used to be one of the largest and most widely celebrated holidays, and culminates in the Burmese New Year, brought a very welcome burst of activity to Lei Thar Gone! Seven rooms were booked, with a total of **twenty guests** staying from 2 to 4 nights! The air conditioners functioned uninterruptedly, thanks to government power and the unusual absence of power cuts!

Two families, staying in the suites were very happy with their stay and asked for a photo of themselves with the staff 😊



- Unfortunately, Ma Su Mon, who works in the reception and does the administrative work and the guest registrations, was admitted to hospital with appendicitis just before the guests arrived. Lyon took over her work as well! Lyon was very proud of the staff that managed so well – no easy feat - to increase performance from practically 0 to over 100% in the shortest possible time and deal successfully with mountains of dishes and bed linens!



as mentioned in the last report, work was needed to repair the retaining walls...

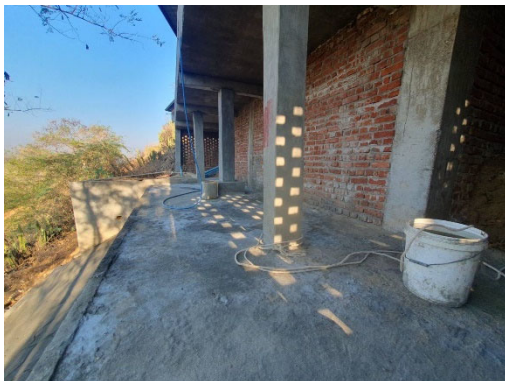




before (page 7) and after by the lower pool



and the retaining walls of the new suites, before the intervention



and after... a job well done!



Investing in the future despite challenging times was one of Eric's significant strategies and a matter close to his heart.

Thankfully, his vision for a hopeful future continues under Lyon's and Zoe's leadership!