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As we marked the fourth year since the military coup on February 1, 2021, Myanmar continues to grapple with profound challenges. Prior to the coup, the country was on a path toward democratic governance, with citizens experiencing increased stability and economic growth. However, the abrupt seizure of power by the military disrupted this progress, leading to widespread unrest and hardship.

The ensuing period has been marked by significant loss: over 6,000 civilians, including more than 700 children and over 1,350 women, have lost their lives, and more than 21,000 individuals are detained as political prisoners. The economy has deteriorated, and millions have been internally displaced or forced to flee abroad, due to the conscription law, creating a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale.

Despite these adversities, the resilience and determination of the Myanmar people shine through. At the Light of Love Foundation, we remain steadfast in our commitment to support and uplift our community during these frustrating and dangerous times, fostering hope and unity in the face of adversity.

In this challenging context, the tourism sector has faced significant setbacks. Despite official efforts to promote Myanmar as a safe destination, ongoing conflicts and safety concerns have led to a sharp decline in international visitors. The Guest House has not been immune to these challenges. Nevertheless, we continue to provide a welcoming space for local travellers and support those around us through these challenging times.

Compounding these difficulties, Myanmar has been experiencing severe power outages, with cities like Yangon and Mandalay enduring up to 16 hours of blackouts daily. These power cuts have also significantly impacted daily life and operations at our school and Guest House. At the Light of Love School, the lack of electricity meant water could not be pumped for the sanitary installations, severely affecting hygiene and daily routines. On the Guest House side, income declined as air conditioners stopped working, discouraging guests, while the high cost of running generators made basic operations financially unsustainable.



NOT FORGOTTEN:

Protests outside the Myanmar Embassy in Berlin on the eve of the 4th anniversary of the coup on 31.01.2025

However, thanks to the generous assistance of the Foundation Hirtenkinder, we successfully renewed and refurbished our solar power installation. Remarkably, this project was completed just days before the devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar on March 28, 2025. This timely completion ensured that we could continue to provide essential services and support to our students, staff, guests and family members during a period of immense hardship.



Oblivious to all the challenges:
Flowers in the LOL compound



Meanwhile at Light of Love...

- We are thrilled, that Kyaw Win Tun – who has a real passion for teaching - was accepted to PYINYA SANYAE in Yangon. This institution offers holistic education, forming young people to become both competent and caring teachers who will serve the children in Myanmar. To date, over 320 students have attended the teacher training courses and gone on to serve in various places throughout the country. For Kyaw Min Tun, this means 1.5 years on site training followed by one in service year. He left for Yangon on January 6th and will stay at the boys' hostel, using the school bus to go to classes. He is happy there and enjoys the new life, although there are some challenges in learning to deal with the various ethnicities and accepting the complex backgrounds of the other students.
- Including Zoe, there are now five PYINYA SANYAE-trained teachers at LOL. This is a tremendous blessing and a great advantage, as the children are learning valuable life skills, engaging with the arts, participating in PE classes and sports days, and are liberated from the “curse” of rote (or parrot) learning — the traditional method used in classrooms in Myanmar.



Discipline – teaching the children to queue!

- As in previous years, the 12th-grade students moved to Light of Love at the beginning of November to better prepare for their final matriculation exams. This year, five students are sitting for the exams. On Saturdays and Sundays, teachers come to provide extra lessons, and in the evenings, the students study on their own. This additional care and support are essential, as many of them do not have electric power, proper furniture, or the privacy needed to study effectively at home.

Construction of the new Pre-School was often delayed due to power cuts, fear of conscription of workers or shortages of material and/or workmen. Nevertheless, it is nearing completion and is a beautiful and impressive structure!



It was necessary to drill a tube-well for the Pre-School, as government-supplied water is often unavailable due to frequent power cuts that shut down the pumps. Thankfully, the water from the tube-well is of good quality and suitable for cooking, washing, and cleaning.



In Zoe's own words, an in-depth reflection on the past academic year:

Mingalar par, many greetings to our Light of Love friends!

As the academic year concluded in the third week of March, we believe this trimester will be an ideal time to share the news of Light of Love High School with all of you. The school year ended in a flash, while we experienced moments that felt like we were on the moon, moments when we shared our tears and offered comforting care, as well as learning from our mistakes. All these moments served as experiences, and we would like you to have a way to connect more deeply with Light of Love, even though we are thousands of miles apart, through our shared experiences.

You will read about the areas that help you to learn our mission and vision, as well as how we are working to achieve them. And the crucial roles of educators, parents, and students.

Firstly, our mission and vision are to *"serve vulnerable children, provide basic needs, and nurture students to be a light for the community through a holistic education, encompasses the values of love, kindness, and empathy, which must be practiced in both teaching and actions"*. We have been working toward this goal for the entire school year.

To continue with our responses, serving vulnerable children and providing basic needs (rations, healthcare, vaccines, water, shelter) are the areas where we can make the most impact, but we still need to work on improving these efforts. For example, houses still need to be rebuilt or repaired for the children that we selected after the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup.

To fulfill the second part of the goal, our responses had to extend our teaching beyond the classrooms, where students can acquire the skills they will need after school. For this, we will highlight only three activities we have introduced.

The first one is that we have scheduled a silent reading time every school day and a book club session once a month. Through this activity, students learned many valuable lessons. Still, our primary objectives were to build the habit of reading, listening to others' sharing, contributing thoughts and ideas in a large group, and developing a reflective mindset.

The second one is Housekeeping Duty; after school, students from Grades 3 to 12 were required to perform cleaning duties throughout the entire school, including the school buses. The school organized the monthly chart with students' names in mixed-age groups and allocated duties. Students carried out their responsibilities under the supervision of the in-charge teachers. Through this activity, young ones learned from their seniors, and students were taught to maintain a clean environment, take on responsibilities, work collaboratively as a team, work with system, and develop a sense of belonging.

The third one was sports time, which all the students enjoyed the most. This activity had a positive impact on their physical development, emotional well-being, unity, leadership, mutual care, and acceptance of the results.

To conclude our responses, we are pleased with the results of the students' involvement in each activity, the positive behavioral changes, and the development of their leadership skills. We believe that all the activities we have introduced to students have served to improve the skills and values they will need for the future. We are excited to welcome the new school year with enhanced activities, based on our evaluation, aimed at achieving better outcomes.

Here comes the most challenging part: We all agree that teachers play a crucial role in the holistic educational process. To achieve this, we provided teacher training to align their teaching and assessment methods with the school's objectives. Sadly, we were not satisfied with the training result. The reasons were that most of our teachers are over their retirement age, so their physical abilities are no longer sufficient for active teaching. Additionally, they are often caught up in the parrot teaching approach, which requires little to no preparation. Positively, the training covered most of the teaching points;

however, the missing point was the lack of practice and practical application of these points in the classroom. Our conclusion is that they need more time to adapt to the new teaching methods and require close observation and support. We are aware that we cannot change their rooted teaching style in the short term. We appreciate their presence at school for over a decade. Since they are making an effort, we have decided to continue the teacher training in the coming school year. You may question why we do not substitute them with younger and more qualified teachers. Our explanation is that, by law, we must employ government licensed teachers to operate as a legitimate school, but it is not easy for newly graduated teachers to obtain licenses as this means attending further (useless) government training. On the other hand, due to the school's location, teachers from cities are not interested in coming to Yenangyaung, and there are also political issues.

In the coming school year, we will observe how our teachers adapt and learn in their profession, as well as the inevitable changes to the law, to determine what is best for the students and the school.

Dealing with guardians is also a challenge. Due to the backgrounds they grew up in, the environment they live in, and the challenges of life, some families do not consider or foresee the future of their children. Their actions include using their children to blackmail us and forcing them to work to contribute to the family income as soon as they are old enough or physically capable. For us, these issues reflect a broader lack of guardian involvement in the students' education — a factor that already poses a significant barrier to their learning. For this purpose, we held «parent» meetings and invited them to school events to give them an idea about their children's experiences at school. We will continue to put more effort into meeting the parents & guardians and inviting them to attend the school's activities, as we saw some positive results from the last school year.

Regarding students, generally, they have all shown improvement in behavior, following school rules, and taking responsibility. In the learning part, we are not satisfied with the performance of some students. It was sad to see students, with the ability to excel in learning, failed to reach their potential due to distractions. Distractions can be varied, and are mainly negatively influenced by the internet, also including gaming, social media, poor parenting, family problems, or our teaching not accommodating their learning style. There was a time when we had to make tough decisions and expel several pupils for the good of the students and the school. The dropout rate, especially among slow learners, is high when transitioning from middle school to high school, as all subjects are taught in English, except for Myanmar and Economics. Families' move for a good job opportunity also impacts the dropout rate. For this area, parents' collaboration is strongly needed. From the school's side, we plan to draw students away from distractions by engaging them in enriching educational activities, opening opportunities that cater to their general interests, and establishing a social-emotional support team. Thus, to nurture students for their futures, parents, students, and teachers all play equal roles, and they must fulfill their roles seriously.

To perform all the above-mentioned activities effectively, we require a team comprised of individuals who contribute their best to the children. When we look back throughout the school year, we have come a few steps forward, and we appreciate it. However, we can still go further if we have a team that holds and sees the same mission and vision of the Foundation. Our reflection on the administrative and operational aspects is to reinforce the structure, select the right members, and support them in performing their tasks confidently for future benefit.

Overall, over the past school year, Light of Love has made progress, marked by a mix of successes and challenges. We view successes as the energy to move forward and embrace the challenges as opportunities for learning. We welcome any challenges that lie ahead to ensure a bright future for our children.

Here, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your unwavering support for the Foundation. We miss your visits and presence at school and the Guest House.

Our prayers are with you always.

Thank you!

Zoe & Light of Love family

In spite of past, present or future challenges a party is always a welcome opportunity to connect, and celebrate moments of joy together.

Impressions of the farewell party that marked the end of the school year:

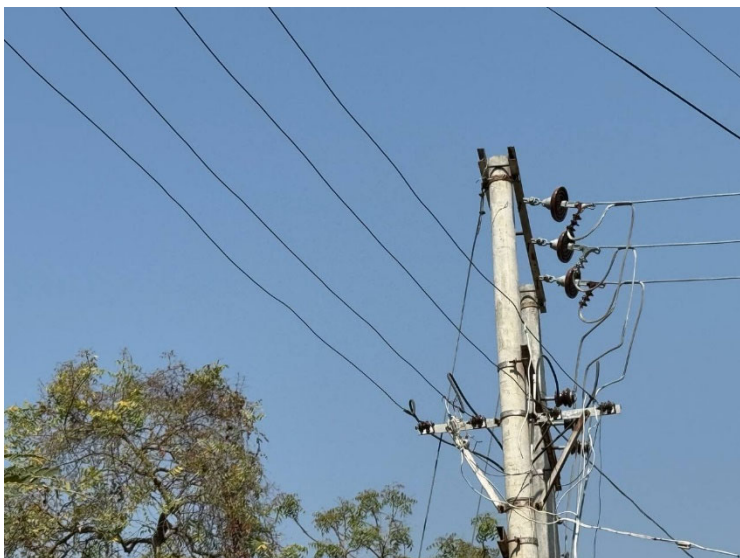


Lei Thar Gone Guest House News - a year that began hopefully...

Despite the ongoing challenges of the conflict in Myanmar, the year began on a hopeful note at the Guest House. Lyon, his wife July, and their son Julian treated the Guest House staff to a much-needed day trip to Bagan in January. It was a welcome opportunity for the team to relax and enjoy some peaceful moments together in the midst of difficult times.



Shortly after, the focus shifted to a major refurbishment of the LTG/LOL solar power system. This included not only the physical reconstruction and battery replacement but also the lengthy process of selecting the right company to carry out the work. Lyon dedicated significant time and energy to this, ensuring the best long-term solution was found. Once the planning was complete, a skilled team of workmen came in to carry out the repairs and upgrades, including a complete rewiring of the system and connection to three-phase power.





This work was completed just in time.

As you know, on March 28th, a devastating earthquake struck Myanmar, causing widespread destruction, loss of life, and severe property damage. The Guest House was not spared. As you can see in the attached photos, the buildings and the pool sustained some damage that required urgent attention. A thorough inspection was conducted to assess the structural stability of all buildings, and repair plans were set in motion.



One of the biggest obstacles to reconstruction has been the cost and availability of cement. Before the earthquake, a 50kg bag cost around 23,000 kyat. After the disaster, the price skyrocketed to 47,000 kyat, making rebuilding nearly impossible for many. In response, the government imposed a new regulation capping the price at 17,000 kyat per bag—well below the previous cost. As a result, cement producers and suppliers simply stopped selling, creating a critical shortage of construction materials.

Lei Thar Gone Guest House – reflections on the 1st trimester 2025 by Lyon Trutwein

The first trimester of 2025 was marked by extreme challenges and gradual recovery for the Guest House. Harsh weather conditions, power instability, and a devastating natural disaster placed immense strain on operations. Despite these hardships, significant progress was made, particularly with the reactivation of the solar power system and the arrival of long-term guests.

1. Power Crisis and Operational Difficulties

- **Severe Heat and Power Cuts:**

The weather is coming hot and chronic power outages (3 hours on, 5 hours off). This affected essential services, including watering plants and electricity for guests.

- **Generator Dependency:**

To maintain operations, the Guest House relied on a diesel generator consuming 5 gallons (approximately 19 liters) daily. With diesel priced at 3,050 kyats per liter, daily fuel costs reached 57'950 kyats, sometimes surpassing 65'000ks, depending on the daily rate. These prices led to significant operational expenses without any incoming revenue during this period.

2. Gradual Income Recovery

- **Guest Arrivals in February:**

Mid-February marked the arrival of a group of Chinese engineers who booked an extended 3-month stay. This became the first source of income since the start of the year and provided a much-needed financial and operational boost.

3. Solar Power Restoration

- **Support from the Swiss Foundation Hirtenkinder**

In early March, with support from Juergen and Margrit Pumpluen's Foundation, the previously non-functional solar power system (dormant for over 2 years) was restored.

- **Impact of Solar Power Revival:**
24-hour power supply restored
- Watering of plants resumed
- Continuous electricity for the Guest House and LOL High School
- Significant cost savings by eliminating daily generator use
- Generator is now reserved for emergencies only

4. Earthquake Damage and Inflation Crisis

- **Mandalay Earthquake:**
A powerful earthquake struck the region, causing serious structural damage to specific sections of the Guest House, just as recovery efforts were underway.
 - Swimming Pool: Base cracked; water drained for safety
 - Room 1: Staircase shifted and cracked
 - Room 5: Supporting beams underneath were displaced and cracked
- **Rebuilding Challenges:**
 - Post-earthquake, the price of cement skyrocketed and became difficult to procure locally, delaying repair effort

Conclusion

The January–April 2025 trimester tested the resilience of the Guest House both financially and structurally. Despite severe power outages and the impact of a natural disaster, key recovery milestones were achieved:

- Revival of solar energy has stabilized operations
- Arrival of long-term guests brought financial relief
- Challenges remain in the form of infrastructure repair and inflation, particularly with building materials

Moving forward, efforts will focus on sourcing affordable construction materials, continuing to support long-term guests, and ensuring the Guest House infrastructure remains safe and operational.

For those that are interested in more in-depth information on the situation, here a few relevant articles about current developments and/or events in Myanmar:

Conscript-Hungry Myanmar Junta Turns Sights on Students

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/conscript-hungry-myanmar-junta-turns-sights-on-students.html>

Myanmar Junta Raids Villages Ahead of Magwe Pagoda Festival

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-raids-villages-ahead-of-magwe-pagoda-festival.html>

Chaungtha Beach resort deserted

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/popular-beach-resort-deserted-as-fighting-spills-over-into-ayeyarwady.html>

Myanmar's Internet Shutdowns: Silencing Resistance in the Battle for Connectivity

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/myanmars-internet-shutdowns-silencing-resistance-in-the-battle-for-connectivity.html>