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Living with Pressure on Every Side

Over the past four months, the people of Myanmar have continued to live under pressure on many fronts. Violence, economic hardship, increasing restrictions on freedom of expression, and growing surveillance are just some of the challenges shaping everyday life.

In Magway Region, the violence has come frighteningly close to Light of Love and Lei Thar Gone. In May and June, military forces carried out a major operation around Myit Chay in Pakokku Township, directly across the Irrawaddy River from Bagan. According to *The Irrawaddy*, more than 40 civilians were reportedly killed, around 1,000 homes were looted and burned, and some 80,000 people were forced to flee.

At the same time, economic hardship continues to affect almost every aspect of daily life. Economists estimate inflation at 30–35%, while prices for basic imports and essential goods have risen by more than 50%. The price of an egg is now between 600-700kyats – with a daily income for manual labourers and shop assistants of approx. 10'000kyats the economic struggle is obvious. Fuel prices have added another burden.

There is also ever less space to speak freely. In June, 71-year-old award-winning author and former teacher U Tin Nyunt and his publisher son were sentenced to three years in prison; the charges are believed to relate to books satirising the military. At the same time, a new committee has been established to monitor online activity 24 hours a day, including social-media posts, shares and likes. The authorities reported taking action against more than 21,000 online users between 2024 and May 2026.

These facts may appear to be separate stories, but together they describe the environment in which Light of Love and Lei Thar Gone operate every day: rising costs, uncertainty and fear, restrictions on what people can say and do, and violence that is never far away. Against this background, keeping a school and a guest house functioning—and providing education, work, security and some sense of normality— is a great achievement in itself. Our sincere thanks and admiration go to Zoe and Lyon for their determined perseverance and unwavering commitment despite the many challenges they face.

At LOL children and flowers bloom
side by side 💜



Light of Love updates...

Preparing for the New School Year

Preparing for a new school year is always a demanding process. Long before the students arrive on the first day, classes and timetables have to be organised, teaching responsibilities assigned, materials prepared, and countless practical details organized.

One major task was finalising the list of students for the new school year. As LOL provides education free of charge to children from disadvantaged families, selecting new students requires considerable care. The process began with an announcement on social media, through village headmen and by word of mouth, with LOL teachers, staff and students helping to spread detailed information about enrolment. Both paying students and children seeking a supported, free-of-charge place at LOL then submitted their enrolment requests. These were first screened according to the school's criteria, after which Zoe and the teachers visited the homes of potential students and met their families. This helped them identify children who genuinely needed the school's support and who were also willing and motivated to learn. After the visits, Zoe and her team reviewed the files, the living conditions and life circumstances they had recorded. Based on their findings, they made the difficult decision about which children to contact and invite to the entrance exams. New students were then assessed to determine the grade in which they could realistically begin; age alone does not determine class placement at LOL. Finding the right starting point for each child is therefore an important—and often difficult—part of the preparation.

Ordering new school uniforms also involves considerable organisation. Each returning student receives one new set – blouses and longyis for girls / trousers and shirts for boys - newcomers receive two. Class by class has to be checked, the correct size recorded for every child, the numbers totalled, and an order placed.

An important final step before the school opened was the meeting for students and their parents or guardians on 28 May. The meeting emphasised that successful education depends on close cooperation between the school, the students and their families. The focus was on student behaviour and discipline, the rules of daily school life, regular attendance and commitment to learning, as well as the important role of parents and guardians in supporting their children's education. For many families, understanding and accepting these expectations is an important part of becoming involved in life at LOL and also an essential factor for their children's successful education.

126 parents/guardians attended the meeting, while 24 were not present. They were informed separately, so that every family had the same clear foundation for the new school year.



May 28th parents, guardians and students gathered to hear about the expectations of LOL

The New School Year Begins

Finally, the big day came: 1 June, and the new school year began. Light of Love welcomed 28 new students, together with three new children in the Pre-School, a total of 31 newcomers.

There were also some new faces among the teachers. Particularly welcome were three PSIE-trained teachers from Yangon, who joined LOL to complete their in-service year and gain practical classroom experience.

The new school year began with **157 students** in the main school and **14 children** in the Pre-School. Of these, a total of 35 are paying students, whose school fees make an important contribution towards the daily fixed running costs of the school.

Behind the students stands Zoe, tirelessly coordinating and guiding the work of the school, together with a team of 34 salaried staff members. This includes not only teachers, but also kitchen staff, bus drivers, cleaning team, and accounting & administrative staff. Together, they keep the many different parts of daily school life running and make it possible for Light of Love to provide education and support to its students.

In August, a further four children joined the Pre-School, bringing the total to 18, of these 7 are paying, as at LOL this helps pay for daily costs such as cleaning, hygiene, material and snacks. The first days, and sometimes even weeks, are often accompanied by many tears, as the Pre-School and its Montessori learning environment are completely different from what the children know from home. And at 2 ½ or 3 some are understandably frightened at being separated from their guardians.

However, with the tender loving care of Khaing Mi Mi San and the other teachers, the children soon feel at home and really enjoy the opportunities for playful learning as well as the healthy lunch they receive daily.

The four new children on their 1st day



Playful learning is fun...

Two young women, Ya Mon and Htoo Nandar Lin, both former LOL students, are currently in Yangon for Montessori training at PSIE. A huge step for them – adjusting to hostel life in Yangon, with its population of about 6 million was a challenge, but they are coping well and thanks to their proficiency in English they have a huge advantage – their 10 classmates are struggling to follow classes. From November on, they will be assigned to a school for three months of practical experience.



A New Hostel for the Boys

As mentioned in the last Report, growing fear of forced conscription and police checks led the guardians of seven male high-school students to ask that their sons remain at Light of Love, where they feel they are better protected. These concerns are more than ever valid.

Lyon recently described an especially disturbing aspect of this situation: according to information he received locally, some officials are exploiting the conscription system for their own financial gain. Families may be asked for as much as 30 million MMK — more than US\$6,000—to secure the release of a young man. Rather than being an official payment to the state, such money is reportedly pocketed by individuals for personal gain. Similar practices have been documented elsewhere in Myanmar, with officials, administrators and brokers reportedly demanding substantial payments from families desperate to keep their sons out of military service. For many families, such large sums mean taking on debt—an already serious problem in Myanmar that has become even more severe under the combined pressure of rising living costs and demands for bribes.

Meanwhile, construction of the new student hostel is complete and the boys have moved into their new home, where they can live in greater security while continuing their education. Our heartfelt thanks go to Marie-Christine Fievet-Bocquet and her association Enfants-de-Birmanie as well as to Juergen & Margrit Pumpluen and the Hirtenkinder Foundation, whose generous support made this vital project possible.



An Odyssey for Textbooks

Buying textbooks for a new school year sounds like a routine task. In today's Myanmar, it can turn into an odyssey involving fear, bureaucracy, bribes, checkpoints—and an unexpected night away from home.

On 19 June, Zoe and Helen set out for Chauk to buy the textbooks for Light of Love. The road between Yenangyaung and Chauk has become increasingly dangerous because of the conflict, making what should have been a routine trip a journey approached with considerable caution.

Deciding on transport was a complicated matter. The Light of Love school bus was too easily identifiable: if members of the People's Defence Force (PDF) saw it travelling to Chauk and Zoe entering a government office, this could be misinterpreted as cooperation with the military authorities. The unmarked truck normally used for food distribution had no roof—not an option in the rainy season with hundreds of books on board. So, Zoe hired a covered truck and driver recommended by Ma San Win.

Leaving at 6:30 a.m., they reached Chauk at 7:45. Then the bureaucratic marathon began: government office for a letter, government bank to pay, back to the office with proof of payment, then finally to collect the books. Nothing could be done online or in advance. LOL needed 170 sets, each containing 10–12 books depending on the grade, total cost 3.8 million MMK (\$800). Buying the books in Mandalay wasn't an option as the required quantity was not available and besides that, they would have cost about twice as much. Zoe also had to pay an additional 150,000 MMK unofficially (= bribe) to avoid further delays in locating and releasing the books.

For safety reasons, the hired driver set off alone with the precious cargo. He was stopped at several checkpoints, but managed to get through by saying the books were a donation and acting as though he knew little about what he was carrying or for whom. By the time everything was completed, the last bus to Yenangyaung at 2.30 p.m. had gone. So, Zoe and Helen were stranded in Chauk. They found a basic motel, briefly visited a famous pagoda, bought dinner and picnicked in their room. They were the only guests, the bathroom was dreadful, and there was no proper bedding. They used their longyis as sheets and spent a largely sleepless night. The next day, they caught the morning bus back home.

All this for something as simple as buying school textbooks — a vivid example of what it takes to simply keep Light of Love running.



July 10th - Waterlevel rising... brick factory had to move...

The textbook odyssey is by no means an isolated incident. As every year, Zoe had to personally go to Magway to renew the teachers' licences, submitting files for 16 teachers. The procedure involved the familiar round of offices: first the Education Office, then the government bank to make the payment, and finally back to the Education Office with the bank slip. This year, the process was even more frustrating. Zoe missed the 21 August deadline because she hadn't been informed of it, then received a warning call on Sunday the 23rd. Monday was a public holiday, Tuesday was the long-planned special «Honouring Eric» birthday celebration at LOL, Wednesday the Education Office was closed because of the fuel crisis, and Thursday and Friday it was closed for a function. When business finally resumed the following Monday, the procedure meant a four-hour absence from LOL for Zoe—all for a simple, routine administrative task, carried out in a highly inefficient system with no alternative procedure available.

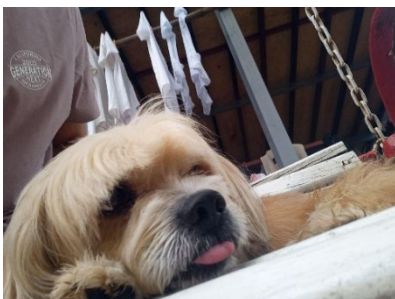
Continuing to learn

In spite of her many daily responsibilities teaching, coordinating and guiding the work of the school, Zoe continues to invest in her own professional development. She recently took part in the course «Trauma-Informed Schools» organised by PSIE, given by specialists from Singapore. It began with online sessions and was followed by an in-person course in Yangon. The course was not only about trauma awareness but introduced tools to support traumatized students and develop an SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) curriculum. SEL builds students' skills in managing emotions, relationships, and decision-making, while trauma-informed practices create safe, supportive environments where those skills can flourish. Together, they form a whole-child approach that promotes resilience, healing, and academic success.

The subject is particularly relevant at Light of Love, where children often come from difficult family backgrounds affected by poverty, debt, alcohol abuse or violence and many carry the effects of traumatic experiences with them into the classroom. Zoe found the training challenging but extremely valuable and is now preparing a course for the LOL teachers. It will cover understanding trauma, SEL, child psychology, child development and the role of memory, helping them to better understand the complex subject and work towards the mission and goal of LOL.



Jack, Zoe's constant companion



*Zoe's cows 😊
buy a cow if milk
becomes too
expensive...*

Grade 12 students. Volunteer work. Collecting plastic waste.

Activities like this raise awareness of environmental responsibility and show students that even small actions can make a positive difference in the communities where they live.



Fun & Games Day, August Birthday Celebration

click on this link for a short video of the Celebration on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1Dakt1zWZv/>

The annual birthday celebration on 25 August holds a special place in the life of Light of Love, keeping alive the memory of Eric - “Baba” to the children. This year, the celebration was accompanied by a variety of activities and competitions, including a poem competition, spelling bee, board games and activities for the Pre-School children. Such occasions offer much more than fun: they give students opportunities to discover their talents, build confidence, learn through friendly competition and enjoy experiences beyond the classroom. At the same time, remembering Baba helps connect today’s students with the person whose vision and commitment made Light of Love possible.

Pre-School kids’ competition



Spelling bee...



Poem competition



Board games competitions



Birthday Celebration



happy faces waiting for the bus home



Lei Thar Gone Guest House

TRIMESTER REPORT II / 2026

This report updates the progress and present operating situation at Lei Thar Gone Guest House since the previous report. The terrace is complete, the solar system continues to serve the property well, and improvements to the grounds are under way. Guest occupancy remains the main concern.

Terrace completed

The terrace that was nearing completion in the previous report has now been finished. It provides an additional outdoor space where future guests can sit, relax, and enjoy the surrounding landscape.

Current guest situation

At present, the guest house has no guests. The situation in Myanmar has become more difficult, and the conscription law is adding to the uncertainty affecting daily life and travel. With no guest income at the moment, we are managing the property carefully while continuing essential upkeep.

Reliable solar electricity

The solar power system is working well and continues to provide reliable electricity for the guest house. This remains one of our most important operational strengths and helps reduce our dependence on the backup generator.

Landscaping in progress

During this quiet period, I am upgrading the landscaping around the guest house. Work visible in the accompanying photographs includes planted garden beds, brick edging, paths, lawn areas, and outdoor seating spaces. Some of this work is still in progress. The aim is to keep Lei Thar Gone welcoming and ready for guests when conditions improve.

Looking ahead

Our immediate priorities are to maintain the solar system and the guest house, continue the landscaping improvements, and be ready to receive guests again. The completed terrace and improved grounds are investments in the future of Lei Thar Gone, even during this difficult period.

Prepared by
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Lei Thar Gone Guest House

Progress in photographs

TERRACE AND GROUNDS | SEPTEMBER 2026



The completed terrace and its planted setting



Outdoor seating and views across the grounds



New brick edging defines a planted garden bed



Garden beds and lawn alongside the guest house



Path and entrance landscaping in progress



Outdoor seating among established trees and planting

On a personal note...

In the last report, Lyon wrote: «My wife is expecting to give birth to a baby girl in August»

Lyon's wife July on June 6th – still waiting



July 17th the waiting is over...

Welcome Aurora



Big brother Jullian is happy to have a little sister :-)



For those that are interested in more in-depth information on the situation, here a few relevant articles:

From Ranks to Riches: Myanmar's New Generation of Corrupt Officers

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/from-ranks-to-riches-myanmars-new-generation-of-corrupt-officers.html>

H&M Supplier Shutdown Leaves 1,000 Garment Workers High and Dry

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/hm-supplier-shutdown-leaves-1000-garment-workers-high-and-dry.html>

New Myanmar Regime Tightens Forcible Conscription Covering 13 million Citizens

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/new-myanmar-regime-tightens-forcible-conscription-covering-13-million-citizens.html>

This report was written by Therese, Zoe and Lyon and the final version, with photos, compiled by Therese