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LEI THAR GONE

Guest House

January 30th 2026 / Trimester Report III / September - December 2025

This introduction is based on an interview with **Nai Aue Mon**, founder of the Human Rights Foundation of Monland*, a civil society organization that documents human rights conditions and delivers humanitarian relief in southeastern Myanmar and along the Thai–Myanmar border.

(*Monland refers to the traditional areas where the Mon ethnic community lives.)

«Myanmar is living through a crisis that is often invisible to the outside world, but unavoidable for the people of Myanmar. Since the military coup in February 2021, violence and repression have affected all parts of daily life. Nearly 30,000 people have been arrested, including more than 6,000 women and 600 children, and over 22,500 people remain in detention. At least 7,000 people have been killed. The conflict has reached every part of the country, with more than 6,800 armed clashes and over 2,600 military air strikes. Schools, churches & monasteries and health facilities are frequently targeted. Today, around 3.8 million people have been forced to flee their homes and are internally displaced.

The political situation also continues to worsen. The first phase of elections promoted by the military began on 28 December 2025. These elections are taking place in an atmosphere of fear and coercion and offer no real choice to the population. Two further phases are scheduled for January. (*The foreseeable outcome and consequences will be a subject in the next report.*) Military operations are being used to reshape territories ahead of these elections, while arrests and censorship silence even peaceful opposition.

Young people are facing particularly serious risks. Forced conscription has led to fear, abductions, and extortion, pushing many youths to flee their communities or leave the country altogether. Those who appear in migration statistics as workers are often escaping violence, with the constant risk that deportation could mean immediate forced military service.

Natural disasters have added another layer of suffering. After the major earthquake in central Myanmar in March, humanitarian access was restricted, volunteers were arrested, and independent aid was blocked. Even so, local networks continued to provide life-saving assistance and are now leading recovery efforts—repairing homes, restoring livelihoods, and helping communities regain a sense of dignity.»

In this difficult context, **Light of Love Private Pre- and High School** continues to offer children from underprivileged backgrounds a chance for a hopeful future. The school's work is made possible through the ongoing commitment of Zoe, whose time, energy, and personal sacrifice are the driving force behind development and new initiatives. At Light of Love, children are not only taught school subjects, but are supported in a holistic way—learning how to live, grow, and believe in themselves. PSIE-trained and local teachers patiently invest in each child according to individual needs, and are themselves in a continuous learning process. Special events such as Sports Days, Christmas and Birthday Celebrations bring excitement, joy and a sense of normalcy, despite the grim situation in the country.

At the same time, Lyon and Lei Thar Gone Guest House continue to operate despite many challenges. The team works hard to maintain the buildings and gardens, and even to keep the swimming pool clean and blue despite the extremely high cost of chlorine and so hold fast to the legacy left by Eric. The Guest House provides training, safety, a sense of home, and stable livelihoods for all staff members.

My sincere thanks and admiration go to everyone involved - for their commitment, resilience, and care for the people and communities they serve.

Meanwhile at Light of Love...

With a compliment to start...

School Inspection

While Zoe was away in Mandalay, a government inspection team unexpectedly visited Light of Love. The inspection was originally scheduled for 26 August, but the date was changed to 5 September without prior notice – unfortunately not an uncommon occurrence in Myanmar. At the time, only Eileen and the teachers were present and had to deal with the situation.

Despite the unforeseen situation, the inspection went very well. The team visited all classes, spoke directly with students, and reviewed the school environment. They noted how students' work is displayed on the classroom walls and saw that the children were confident and happy. One inspector commented that Light of Love was the best school in the Magway Region, and they expressed strong overall satisfaction, requesting only minor corrections.

The inspectors also shared that, in the future, private schools will be formally assessed and given official ratings. They added that they had not been satisfied with the other three private schools in Yenangyaung, which makes their praise for Light of Love even more meaningful.

This is a great compliment for Zoe's leadership and the teachers' dedication. Even in her absence, the school demonstrated the strong values and quality that define it.

World Teachers Day, 5 October 2025 (celebrated on the 4th)



Three LOL teachers were honoured:

- Tr. Zin Htwe Naing
(High School)
- Tr. Aye Aye Swe
(Middle School Math teacher)
- Tr. Htarr Htarr Ei
(Primary School)



Thank you, teachers, for guiding, inspiring and nurturing our future!

**As a special treat for the teachers and to say «THANK YOU»
Zoe invited them to Bagan on October 5th**



Of course, Jack, Zoe's faithful companion joined the party.....

The teachers enjoyed having henna designs painted on their hands. The result looks like a tattoo, but as only natural plant dye is used it lasts only about a week. The teachers spend most of their time at LOL and live in Yenangyaung with few opportunities for leisure, so this was a special and fun experience.



A challenge....

All PSIE-trained teachers were again required to attend full-day classes at Yenangyaung University in October or November for one month and this will continue over a period of four years. After completion, they can apply for an official teacher's license. While the training does not introduce significant new content, the license is essential, as it provides legal recognition, protects the school during inspections, and allows teachers to continue working in registered private schools. Their absence was, as always, a huge challenge, as Zoe and Helen - in addition to their regular responsibilities and classes – had to take over all other classes... But even though this is exhausting for Zoe and Helen, it is essential for the long-term stability of the school. And thanks to their ability to handle stress, their resilience and flexibility they got through these demanding weeks successfully.

And again, school inspectors...

After postponing their visit three times, the inspectors - a group of 7 persons - announced a visit for 8 December. They stated in advance that they would stay for lunch, including a specific request for chicken (they actually said «we want chicken»).

As is common practice, the school is expected to host them, without any hope that they will share in the cost...

The visit itself followed the familiar pattern. The inspectors reviewed paperwork, checked names in the school register, and made routine observations. As in previous visits, they expressed satisfaction with LOL and its performance. A new regulation was introduced which requires that student attendance be checked not once a day, but for each of the eight daily teaching periods.

At LOL, students and teachers remain on the compound throughout the day, the school gates are closed, and most children arrive and leave by school bus, with no possibility of coming and going independently. Therefore, Zoe isn't planning to strictly follow this new requirement because it is very time consuming and adds administrative burdens without any added value.

One new member of the group asked Zoe countless questions about the methods used at LOL for marking papers, assessing the students and keeping records. The group was amazed at her explanations and even copied her documents for future use – again a huge compliment for Zoe and LOL!

The lady in red is the leader of the inspector group...





Much patience, work and many visits to the township offices were needed until the day finally came:

At last, and just in time, the LICENSE FOR THE LIGHT OF LOVE FOUNDATION WAS RENEWED! AND IS VALID UNTIL 2030.

Parents (or guardians) meeting

Meetings with parents or guardians are always an important but work-intensive fixed point during the school year. And are - as was the case this year - usually held in November. The teachers, parents/guardians and Zoe first meet class by class and then there are one to one talks. These meetings always require special care and attention because many of the parents/guardians don't understand why their children are at LOL and what they do when there, as often they themselves can neither read nor write. They realize that their children are better educated and this is humiliating. So, it is important to create an atmosphere where the parents don't feel left out because their support is vital. With them, Zoe and the teachers discuss the child's progress, development and ways in which classroom participation can be improved.

This year the big issue was «screen time» - explaining to the parents why they should actively limit it and even encourage the children to go without their phones during the school week. The meetings had a very positive effect on the children; in spite of the restrictions, they were glad to have their parents/guardians involved in their daily lives. To ensure lasting change, Zoe and the teachers will have to monitor the application of the promises made. But it is encouraging to see, that these measures have already had positive effects – because of limited screen time and limited or even non-existent leisure activities, the children have turned to studying more, behaviour has improved and, in several cases, even their physical appearance changed for the better.



In her very limited free time, Zoe enjoys carpentry work – here using a fallen tree to make a bench, which is now happily used by the children



Besides teaching there are many other duties, responsibilities and assignments that fill Zoe's days at LOL. In addition, there are often special events, such as Spelling Bee Days, Student Council meetings, Teacher of the month awards or Birthday Celebrations to be organized and carried out.

Ensuring the safety and well-being of the children at LOL is another responsibility Zoe has. She often receives reports of dreadful housing conditions of students and needs to take action – verify settings, define measures, clarify legal matters, secure funding, order building material, supervise progress of construction.... Here the house of a student that had actually become dangerous to live in:

Before:



After



Flowers in the school garden are always a source of joy



PRE-SCHOOL

There are now eight children attending pre-school and they are enthusiastic about everything they learn – and are making progress. It is a great pleasure to see how they thrive!



Here the four teachers responsible (from left to right):
Teacher Yamon, a former LOL student, Teacher Rose (PSIE trained),
Teacher Khaing Mi Mi San (PSIE trained, head teacher)
Teacher Shoon Shoon (new teacher, recruited locally to replace Rose who will be returning to Yangon in March, at the end of the 2025/2026 School Year)



Sports Days / 17th and 18th of December

The Sports Days took place over two days and were about much more than games and competition. They were designed to help students practise unity, caring, teamwork, respect for rules, and leadership through shared activities and mixed teams. Teachers observed not only performance, but also how students supported one another, acted fairly, and took responsibility.

Winning was not the main focus. Half of the final evaluation was based on how well these values were lived out, rather than on game results alone. In this way, Sports Days reflected Light of Love's wider educational approach: learning through experience, building character, and growing together.



Award Ceremony / Welcoming Christmas and the New Year / 20th December

The Christmas celebration is always one of the most important events of the school year and requires careful planning and close coordination with the teachers. Early on, it became clear that the premises of Light of Love would not be large enough, and a hall in Yenangyaung was rented for the event. For the first time, printed invitations were issued, with entry limited to two people per invitation. In practice, many people also brought their children, teachers invited friends and even local market vendors asked to join. In total, the incredible total of 525 people attended the celebration!

The organisation was extensive and demanding. Great care was taken to ensure that the technical equipment, music, and presentations functioned smoothly, that invited guests were welcomed, and that refreshments were prepared and served.

A PowerPoint presentation was shown to give parents greater insight into daily school life and the children's learning. Song lyrics were projected so that everyone could sing along, and the school's motto song, «Be a Light,» was also sung and the meaning explained.

Each class gave a performance, with singing or dancing prepared in advance, and costumes carefully organised. Many teachers even brought a change of clothing, wearing their regular school uniform in the morning and changing into festive attire for the celebration.

A professional photographer documented the event, capturing this joyful moment of community and shared celebration.

Despite the complexity, the 3 ½ hour event was a great success, and everyone stayed until the end, making it a highlight of the year for children, families, and teachers alike.



Town Hall where the Christmas Celebration took place 💜



from the youngest to the oldest – all classes took part and performed during the Celebration



The entire teaching staff

High School students' excursion to Mandalay and Pyin Oo Lwin 21st – 24th December



Hardly was Hardly was the Christmas Celebration over, when another highlight followed. The very next day, Zoe took the sixteen LOL High School students on an excursion to Mandalay and Pyin Oo Lwin, fulfilling their long-held wish for a trip of their own. They stayed at Zoe's family home in Mandalay where Tracy, Zoe's sister cooked for them. They visited historic sites and the Kandawgyi Gardens. **An unforgettable, jaw-dropping experience for them all.**

Reflections On Our School Trip (Students reflections collected & summarized by Zoe)

Our school trip was an unforgettable experience that opened our minds beyond the classroom walls. Traveling together as students with Tr Zoe, we explored not only a new place but also new perspectives, friendships, and ways of understanding the world around us.

One of the most valuable aspects of the trip was the chance to bond with classmates from different grades in a different setting. We learned to cooperate, share responsibilities, and respect each other's space, opinions, and diversity. Whether it was helping each other pack, exploring new things together, or sharing meals, we discovered the importance of teamwork and kindness, as well as how to fit into the group. Some students who were shy in class became more confident, and new friendships blossomed.

The trip was also rich in educational value. We visited historical sites and highlighted places that taught us about the town's culture and traditions, and connected the book's learning points to real life. It was learning through experience. Another important lesson was learning how to manage pocket money. We had to make careful choices about what to buy—whether snacks, souvenirs, or small gifts. This taught us the value of money, the importance of budgeting, and how to prioritize needs over wants. Some students learned to save for something meaningful, while others realized how quickly money can disappear if not managed wisely.

One of the most eye-opening parts of the trip was comparing our hometown with the town we visited. We noticed differences in architecture, transportation, and even the way people greeted each other. The towns we visited had more modern buildings and busier streets, while our town felt quieter. We saw how geography, development, and local customs shape a community's way of life. These differences helped us appreciate both towns more deeply and understand that diversity is something to be celebrated.

This trip taught us lessons that will stay with us for a lifetime. We would like to sincerely thank Tr. Zoe, who made our school trip possible. Your support, guidance, and effort gave us the chance to learn outside the classroom and experience new places together. This journey was not only enjoyable but also full of valuable lessons in friendship, knowledge, and responsibility.

We are truly grateful for the care and planning that went into making the trip safe and meaningful. Because of this experience, we now look forward with excitement to more opportunities like this in the future. May many more trips allow us to learn, grow, and create lasting memories together.

Lei Thar Gone Guest House News

Lyon's responsibility for managing Lei Thar Gone Guest House remains demanding, as the political situation and high inflation continue to affect daily operations. In addition, the police carry out frequent checks, often several times a week, to inspect the guest register. These checks are largely unnecessary, as guest registration is already required by law and must be completed on arrival and taken in person to several offices in town within one hour of check-in, with no option for online processing.

However, there is reason to celebrate - at the end of 2025, Lyon, July, and the staff can look back on a year that was strikingly busier and more alive than the year before. While challenges remain, the Guest House experienced a strong return of activity and guests.

The difference between the two years is clear in the income figures. In 2024, the Guest House earned only 5,396,225 kyats and in seven out of twelve months there wasn't a single guest. In contrast, 2025 saw an impressive increase of income to 68,993,850 kyats. There were no months without guests, and even in the quietest month of August, two rooms were booked for one night. Despite this welcome development, the Guest House still ended 2025 with a loss, although it was five times smaller than in 2024, showing real progress under difficult conditions.

Besides this operational success, there is also important personal news! Lyon and July are expecting their first child, bringing hope and joy into their family life. **Congratulations!**

At the same time, Jullian, Lyon's son from his previous marriage, celebrated his 9th birthday in September, marking another meaningful milestone in a year marked by many highs and lows.

Reflections on the 3rd Trimester 2025, by Lyon Trutwein

Operational & Development Report / September – December 2025

Introduction

This period in 2025 represented a phase of renewed construction, cautious recovery, and continued economic pressure for Lei Thar Gone Guest House. While important structural improvements were carried out and long-term guests returned, rising prices and inflation significantly affected daily operations.

Major Retaining Wall Construction

A large-scale construction project was completed to repair and reinforce the retaining wall beside the lower houses. This work was essential for long-term safety following earthquake-related risks. Special thanks and deep appreciation are extended to Juergen and Margrit Pumpluen and the Hirtenkinder Foundation, whose support made this critical project possible.



Terrace Renovation – Breakfast Area

Repair work continued on the terrace used for breakfast preparation and service. Rising material costs slowed progress, but improvements are steadily enhancing safety and guest comfort.



Severe cracks posed a danger of the terrace collapsing



Return of Long-Term Guests

Chinese long-term guests returned during this period, restoring operational activity and income. Their presence remains vital for financial sustainability, though net income is reduced by rising expenses.

Rising Costs and Inflation Pressure

Food prices, daily supplies, transportation, and construction materials increased sharply. These inflationary pressures placed significant strain on operating budgets and required careful financial management.

Solar Power System – Ongoing Stability

The solar power system continued to operate reliably throughout the year, providing stable electricity, supporting ongoing construction work, and eliminating generator fuel costs. The dramatic increase in Guest House income is also closely linked to the return of dependable solar power, which made regular operations possible again.

Our sincere thanks go to Juergen and Margrit Pumpluen and the Hirtenkinder Foundation for their generosity and continued support, without which this progress would not have been possible.

Conclusion

Despite high inflation and rising costs, the Guest House achieved meaningful progress through structural improvements, guest returns, and dependable solar power. These factors strengthened resilience and confidence for the future.

Looking Ahead

Priorities include completing terrace renovations, managing expenses carefully, supporting long-term guests, and maintaining safety and cost efficiency through solar energy.



...the brick factory is back in action



State of the terrace renovation on December 30th



November: maintenance of the fence and area below the pool



View from the terrace, as beautiful as ever...

Sometimes, there are bright spots:

Bo Phyu, a famous Myanmar singer – he has 35'825 listeners per month on Spotify - and his wife stayed at the Guest House for one night on 11 November. He was invited for the opening of a new restaurant in Yenangyaung where he also gave a concert. A much-loved song of his is «**Lin Khay Ah Win,**» a ballad for people who miss their hometown – which under the current situation is certain to be several million...

Here a link to the song on YouTube <https://youtu.be/20C8Z3XezPI?si=gKW1x75uzZhZeCz9>

They really enjoyed their brief stay and took lots of photos!



Because **Lei Thar Gone** is a very special place and has a spectacular view, Lyon often receives requests for birthday celebrations, wedding photo shoots, and marriage proposals. Unlike in Europe, a marriage proposal is not a spontaneous event but is usually planned in advance by the bride, wedding dress and all....



Dressing room with a view...



Will you marry me? She said «YES» 💜

Jullian celebrating on September 1st



a surprise party – 9 years old today!

And in October it was Lyon's turn to celebrate...



For those that are interested in more in-depth information on the situation, here a relevant article about «TURNING POINTS» in Myanmar.

Myanmar's Endless Turning Points

Guest column by Tony Waters, professor of sociology, currently at Leuphana University, Germany.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/myanmars-endless-turning-points.html>

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