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Education sector is flourishing in 2010

This year's education supplement shines a light on the rapidly evolving educational system in Myanmar. In an era where education has the ability to shape lives, we are aiming to illustrate the overall scope of Myanmar's educational system.

In 2005 UNESCO estimated that Myanmar's overall literacy rate stood at 89.7 percent, a legacy no doubt of what was once the finest educational system in Southeast Asia. The nation has developed substantially since the days of monastic education acting as a primary educator, now it fills a void in an advancing system of both government and private institutions.

At junior levels, children enjoy a diverse curriculum in all spectrums of the education sector. Mandalay has 130 pre-schools focusing on language and child development. International schools flourish in Yangon,

which has many schools and institutions teaching a variety of internationally recognized curriculums.

Tertiary students are increasingly looking abroad in their quest for knowledge. The umbrella of a globalised education system is clearly evident and students are benefiting from a huge network of overseas universities looking to capitalize on Asia's new wealth.

Educational agencies have sprung to life all throughout Yangon. Industry insiders are estimating their numbers to be in the hundreds, a promising prospect for students wishing to study abroad.

Obtaining a student visa can be challenging and embassies are warning applicants not to make any financial commitments until a visa is issued.

Myanmar has a wealth of educated professionals. If you are struggling for inspiration then our interviews with the nation's best businessmen, entrepreneurs and industry experts will



Students enjoy a multitude of study, learning options

By Juliet Shwe Gaung

SAVVY young Myanmar students should choose their careers with great care, and keep a close eye on the changing education and employment situation in order to position themselves, say experienced educators.

High-school graduates face three possible scenarios—further study overseas, further study in Myanmar, or getting a job—and different preparation is required for each option, said U Aye Kyaw, principal of Myanmar Human Resources.

Students wishing to study abroad can attend pre-university or university foundation courses, as well as learning about the language and culture of the country in which they will be studying.

"Some students fail to do well because they don't know what kind of subject they are going to study abroad. The preparatory course should match the major," said U Aye Kyaw.

As for language preparation, some teachers at foreign universities have complained that some students who arrive with good marks in TOEFL or IELTS still have language difficulties, he



A reader views *The Myanmar Times* 2009 Education feature. Industry experts are warning students to make wise choices about their education. Pic: Hein Latt Aung

said.

Information on the status of the university can be accessed on the internet through government websites such as ministry of education or recognition of university's recognition council as well as just checking the school's website, he said.

"A course that an American university said it planned to offer in Myanmar was still listed as 'pending' on the Colorado state government website, where the university was located," said U Aye Kyaw.

The student should research which universities are well known for which subjects. "The university's image is really important if you are applying for jobs abroad in that field, or pursuing further study at a different university," he said.

Those who intend to study at local universities should beware of applying for courses just because they earned

high marks in those subjects at school.

"If a student applies for a course just because of the marks, it affects two applicants—the applicant, who doesn't have a clear vision of his or her future profession, and the person who really likes the subject but fails to get enough marks to be admitted," said U Aye Kyaw.

Youngsters weighing up which career to pursue should consider what professions might become popular in the future, he said.

Students can broaden their appeal to universities and future employers alike by extracurricular activities such as social work, even if the student aims to study locally. "At least you get to know more people," said U Aye Kyaw.

Daw June, a 20-year veteran of high-school teaching who now tutors English privately, said the two-month

break before high school should provide time for a thorough study of the syllabus.

She gave the example of a medical student who worked hard despite financial difficulties.

"He would take along a sewing machine during the semester and do sewing work for friends, and sell vegetables during the evening, and study at the same time. Concentration can really work wonders, coupled with hard work," she said.

Wide reading also helps in preparation for English, she said.

Students abroad have the chance to take "student employment" to pay for college, while most young Myanmar people with good grades can also work as high school guides.

"Not many companies offer part-time jobs for students, but these jobs do exist," said U Aye Kyaw.

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Dubious agents entice students short of visa

By Tom Hunter

EMBASSIES in Yangon are warning students to be cautious of visa-traps, urging them to take all necessary steps to ensure they meet the student visa requirements.

A spokesperson for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) in Yangon told The Myanmar Times that students should be wary of educational agents looking to profit from student visa schemes.

"We would certainly advise any potential student visa applicants to obtain information from DIAC directly, rather than obtain their information through agents. There are many dubious agents and companies in Yangon providing false information to their clients," Daniel Gelphe said.

In a statement released to the media Australian Minister for Immigration, Senator Chris Evans said that students wishing to study in Australia should also be aware of new visa regulations.

"Students will need to demonstrate that they have access to at least AU\$18,000 a year to fund their living costs in Australia, instead of the 2009 requirement of AU\$12,000," he said adding that the new figure better reflect student

costs in Australia.

"It is important that students understand these financial requirements are only the minimum amount required for a student visa," Senator Evans said.

"Prospective students are encouraged to conduct their own research so they can make an informed decision about what study in Australia will cost," he said.

Students wishing to study in the United States, like all non-immigrant visa applicants, must overcome the presumption under US law that they are intending immigrants.

The Assistant Public Affairs Officer, Drake Weisert told The Myanmar Times, that in order to gain a US student-visa, students should present evidence that they have strong ties to Myanmar which will compel them to return after their studies have concluded.

Weisert also stressed that students should not make any financial commitments to studying abroad, such as airline tickets, until a visa had been granted.

For visa information see: Australia- www.immi.gov.au, US-http://burma.usembassy.gov/visa_services.html, Singapore- www.ica.gov.sg

Students voice concerns about studying in Aus

By Tom Hunter

IN Australia a rise in violent crimes against international students threatens to destabilise the countries lucrative university market which has become a favored destination for international students from Myanmar.

The Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship granted more than 320,000 international student visas in the 2008-9 period mostly to India and China, with 448 of those going to students from Myanmar. The industry is reported to be worth close to AU\$12 billion each year to the Australian economy.

Myanmar's students say that while safety is an issue for them, it would not dissuade them from traveling to Australia to study.

"We may be facing a lot of discrimination when we travel abroad, but we have to go abroad to study, so for us it is not an issue," Myanmar student, Aung Ko Minn said.

"I think that as long as I go abroad to study and not to work then I won't have a problem," he said.

Naing Linn Htun, currently doing his GCEO levels in Yangon, said that going to a coun-



Pic: AFP

In this photo angry students rally in the streets on Melbourne after a spate of racist attacks on Indian students.

try like Australia where he doesn't speak the language could be a problem.

"For me its worth it. The facilities in Australia are so great that I would still go there to study," he said.

There have been no reported attacks against Myanmar students in the latest spate of Australian assaults.

The rise in attacks however has led the Indian government to increase its official travel advisory, urging its students to be cautious in Australia.

"The Ministry of External Affairs cautions Indian students who are planning to study in Australia that there

have been several incidents of robbery and assault on Indians in Australia, particularly in Melbourne, which has seen an increase in violence on its streets in recent years," the government advisory states.

"Increasingly, the acts of violence are often accompanied by verbal abuse, fuelled by alcohol and drugs," the advisory adds.

PM Kevin Rudd, hosted a community "think tank" in the Australian city of Adelaide, January 20, looking to address public concerns about the issue, which remains largely in the public eye.

Deputy Prime Minister Ju-

lia Gillard told reporters in Australia that despite the recent spate of violence, generally the feedback received from the nearly half a million Indian students was positive towards the country, but that did not excuse the incidents.

She acknowledged that parents whose children are studying in Australia must be worried about their children.

"We're absolutely disgusted with some of the violent incidents we've seen involving Indian students," she said to loud applause from the crowd.

"There have clearly been policing problems and the Victorian and NSW police particularly have been responding."

She said the government was working with the police and various education outlets to educate students before they came to Australia and to ensure there is regulation of the outlets that send students to the country.

Immigration Minister Chris Evans said while the international education system was very important in Australia, migrants were chosen based on Australia's needs and what would help the economy.

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Garden school sews new hope

Mingun "Garden School", is a testament to how one person can make a real difference in their community and meet needs the public and private sector cannot or will not.

By Thomas Kean

IN the shadow of Mingun Pagoda – dubbed by one early traveller "the world's largest pile of bricks" – is a privately run school.

Known as the "Garden School", it is testament to how one person can make a real difference in their community and meet needs the public and private sector cannot or will not.

Ko Thant Zin was just a 21-year-old English-language student when he founded the Garden School in 2002. From his house he provided free English tuition to 20 students from the local

More than seven years later, the Garden School has 240 enrolled students. From a larger but still modest four-room building, Ko Thant Zin and 13 other teachers provide tutoring in computer studies, mathematics, physics, chemistry, economics and biology as well as English.

Classes are held in the morning, evening and on weekends, and are designed to complement, rather than replace.

In a small building on Mingun's main road, near the jetty where tourists disembark after arriving by boat from Mandalay, the school also runs sewing classes for young women. In rural communities like Mingun



Garden School principal Ko Thant Zin points to a picture of his first class in 2002-03, when he began providing English tuition to students from the nearby government school at his house. Pic: Thomas Kean

In the workshop, which has about 20 sewing machines, students like 12-year-old Ma Thet Thet Moe produce various garments, including shirts, ties and longyis, that are then sold in Mandalay. The women are paid per piece and the school supplies the material.

"I dropped out of school because my family couldn't afford to send me any more

communities. But, when he started the Garden School, Ko Thant Zin recognised that the villages around Mingun had one asset that could be harnessed: a small but relatively steady stream of foreign tourists.

While many tried – and still do – to earn a few thousand kyats a day selling souvenirs or guiding foreigners around Mingun Pagoda, he instead

other teachers a small salary – the equivalent of about US\$20 a month.

"This is an opportunity for me," says 18-year-old Ko Ye Min Kaung, who tutors economics students. "I can earn some money while completing my course at Shwebo University."

The students are aged from four to 20 years and the oldest are usually "repeat-

money to complete the rest of the project.

"We'll need about \$15,000 for the whole project but we don't have enough space in our present building for classrooms. It will also give us the chance to host foreign visitors, who can help teach the children English," he says.

The extension has got the approval of the local authori-

It is not easy to get English tutoring here, and hardly anyone owns a computer... most of the teachers don't know how to use them

and I wasn't really interested anyway. I looked for work but couldn't find anything so five weeks ago I began attending the sewing classes," Ma Thet Thet Moe says. "Now, at least, I can make a little bit of extra money."

It is not only women who lack opportunities in rural

appealed to visitors for funds to develop his project.

"And not long after, in 2003, I met a German man who offered to support me with regular funding," he says.

As well as allowing him to purchase equipment, the funding means Ko Thant Zin can, for example, pay the

ers": those who have failed their matriculation and are attempting to pass for the second and sometimes third time. Most of these students come from poor families.

For them, the Garden School provides a vital chance to get their education back on track.

Others are just happy to have the opportunity to learn new skills, like 13-year-old Ma Hla Su Po, who had just entered the eighth standard when I talked to students at the Garden School last year, my fifth visit since I arrived in Myanmar in 2007.

"I enjoy learning how to type, in both English and Myanmar-language. We use programs like Microsoft Word and Excel, Paint. Now we're learning how to use [Adobe] Photoshop," she told me.

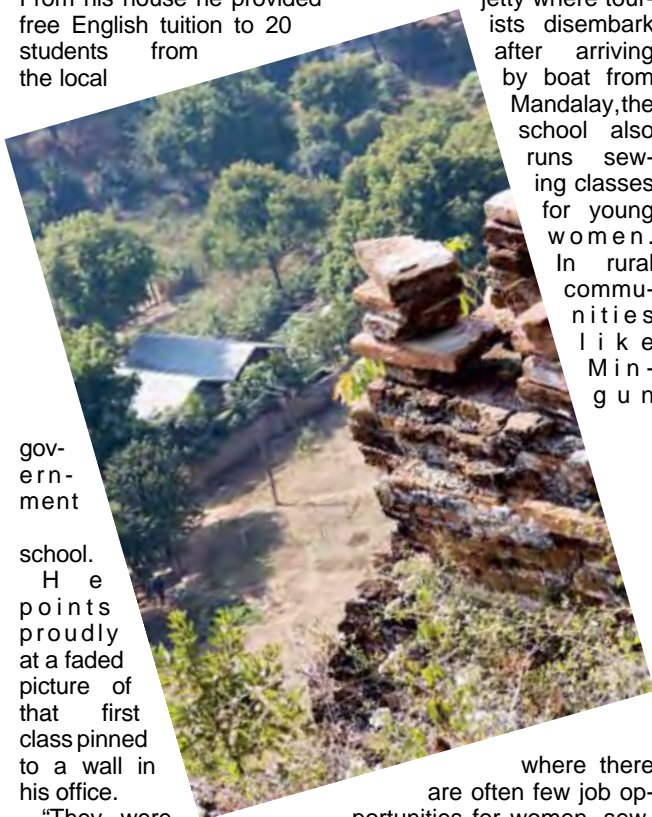
Judging from the comments in the book where foreign visitors log their donations, most are surprised at finding a facility like this in Mingun.

But, while proud of what he has achieved so far, Ko Thant Zin plans to expand the Garden School further. The foundations for a two-storey school building have already been laid, and he hopes to soon have enough

ties, who, Ko Thant Zin says, are supportive of what he is trying to achieve.

"My next aim is to get a satellite telephone connection to Mingun, that would mean we could have the internet in our classroom," he says. "The satellite connection will cost at least \$10,000 but it would be amazing for the students to be able to chat with English speakers and access information whenever they need it."

Those interested in making a donation or providing other support can contact Ko Thant Zin via email at thantz-in1977@googlemail.com.



government

school. He points proudly at a faded picture of that first class pinned to a wall in his office.

"They were so eager to learn, my first class," Ko Thant Zin says.

where there are often few job opportunities for women, sewing and tailoring offer the chance to generate a small income.

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Music facilitates learning where it's most needed

By Aye Aye Myo

ASK any child what their favourite time at school is and nine times out of ten they will tell you either play time or music. Whilst most children will quickly dismiss any informative material forced on them during playtime, things change during music class.

If you ask an aid worker in the Delta which learning tech-

and held education seminars comprising of traditional dance, song and humorous educational dramas.

"We managed to attract huge audiences in rural areas and people took pleasure in watching the performances whilst absorbed important information regarding health and well being," he said.

"The performances mainly focused on issues concerning

May 2008.

Edutainment in the classroom however is an age old technique being adopted by Myanmar's teachers to keep kids stimulated at a primary level.

A spokesperson for Pride International Education Centre(PIEC), said that children often find it a lot easier to remember important learning tools when you associate

pair the two it dramatically improves a child's literacy and brain development.

Students at PIEC begin to learn pronunciation, gesture and harmony from the early age of three, with musical theory being taught in the later years of education.

At government run schools things music may not be an every day occurrence for all kids but it is taught in senior classes.

Traditional songs and dances are for senior students whereas songs and poems illustrations are for the junior students,"a teacher from Botahtaung Basic Education High School (5), Daw Khin Nyein Yee said.

The school also joins together once a year to practice for the annual fun-fair.

"We have very limited space but students from kindergarten to year eight all join together to practice and learn new songs," she said.



Pic: Myanmar Times

■ We managed to attract huge audiences, people took pleasure absorbing important information regarding health. ■

nique is most popular with local communities trying to rebuild their devastated villages, nine times out of ten they will give a similar answer.

The learning model dubbed as "edutainment" is proving a useful tool for both Myanmar's teachers and aid workers alike.

In the wake of Cyclone Nargis, Social Vision Services (SVS), found that community members were often unresponsive to traditional seminars being held to aid in the reconstruction of the Delta.

"We found that the people were extremely traumatised, so our role focused of improving health, hygiene and self improvement using entertainment as a tool to lift peoples spirits," U Su Tin, President of Social Vision Services told The Myanmar Times.

In combination with UNICEF, SUV set up huge stages

water, food and sanitation," he said.

The mobile entertainment unit traveled the stricken Delta region with a troop of 50 members including 12 performers from the University of Culture.

The shows usually go for up to two hours but the duration of the performances have been known to vary along with the tides.

"If people in the Delta can't return home then we just keep going," U Su Tin said.

"People in rural areas seem pleased with our shows. We encourage audience participation and give our sanitary products when an audience member gives a correct answer.

"If we can reduce the suffering of at least one villager every show then its all worthwhile," U Su Tin said.

SUV has been performing at various locations in conjunction with UNICEF since

them with music.

"If you pair a poem with song then the child is a lot more likely to retain the words- for example the ABC is a lot easier to remember if you learn it as a melody," he said

"Students are improving their language skills simply by associating words with the flow and tune of the music," he said.

"Music and language are definitely interwoven, if you

Pre-schools boom in Mandalay

By Khin Su Wai

THE market for pre-school education in Mandalay is set to boom over the next few years, industry insiders predict.

The expansion will be fuelled by lifestyle changes and shifts in the nature of education for the very young, they say. International preschool companies are already investing in Mandalay. Ten years ago there was only one international pre-school, now there are four. There are signs of competition amongst the city's 130 preschools (both private and government run) as they advertise their different teaching techniques and syllabuses.

"Things are different now from when we were children. When I was young, there were no preschools. We had many brothers and sisters, and the older ones would look after the younger ones. Most families now may have only one or two children, but if both parents work they don't have the time to look after them properly. That's the cause of

the preschool boom," said Dr Phyu Phyu Win, principal of the Australian Institute of Technology (AIT).

Preschool establishments can be government-run preschools, international preschools or private preschools, with fees ranging between K30,000 to K150,000 per month.

"We have three levels in our preschool: nursery for 3-4 year-olds, pre-kindergarten for 4 to 5 year-olds and kindergarten for 5 to 6 year-olds. Each level has a different curriculum. Our motto is 'Play and Learn'," said Daw Thwet Thwet Yin Su, pre school principal of Horizon International.

"Early childhood education is extremely important. It is the foundation for children's development, not just in education, but also in social and emotional skills. Our plan for 2010 is to open a summer school program at the first and biggest preschool in Myanmar, which is situated in Mandalay," said Daw Thwet Thwet Yin Su.

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Professionals choose MBAs

By Ei Ei Mar

TEACHING the business of business is a big business in itself.

And the study of business – to become a Master of Business Administration – is attracting more and more students who want to know how the world of business works.

Any business professional will develop practical knowledge about the field in which they work, as well as various aspects of running a company. But this is not the same as understanding the theory of management, and knowing how to apply its lessons to any situation that might arise, in companies large and small.

Experience is enormous but it should be combined by theoretical knowledge and here comes the importance of the subjects taught at the Master of Business Administration.

The Yangon Institute of Economics offers an MBA course – full-time or evening – that has so far produced about 1200 graduates – not many in a country with more than 40,000 companies.

In many firms, managers get through the day without having studied the principles of management, economics, marketing, trade, human resource management, financial control techniques, international business management and so on. This doesn't



MBA students inspect a wood processing factory in Hlaing Thayar Industrial Zone, Yangon. Pic: Myo Lwin

mean they don't know what they're doing. These companies may well be successful and prosperous. But in a rapidly changing domestic and international environment, something more than practical on-the-job experience may be required.

Most MBA students at the institute are entrepreneurs, senior executives or ambitious and energetic youngsters eager to start up their own businesses. Despite their varied backgrounds, what they have in common is the urge to manage their businesses systematically and to forge useful connections with their fellow students.

The course's graduates are in no doubt as to its value.

"All the subjects taught at the MBA course are invaluable. Every word is worth swallowing and applying," said U Myo Lwin, who got his MBA from the institute in March 2009.

"Some of the books are just common sense – keep costs low, and aim for continuous improvement," he added.

"I believe this MBA is vital for almost 70 percent of entrepreneurs," said U Zaw Naing Oo of Pearl Group Decoration, another graduate.

"During the two-year course we had to learn about economy and business. And we had the chance to attend weekly seminars arranged by the faculty members.

"Some successful entrepreneurs came to present lectures on their experiences and to take our questions. As a result, we learned a lot about many subjects, including how to tackle problems arising during a start-up," he added.

"At the same time, I also made a lot of new friends from various fields of business. So I would say this MBA course is worth attend-

ing – it's played a vital role in my career development," he said.

The course curriculum comprises about 30 subjects, and all candidates have to sit for a quarterly examination on each subject. "Most candidates who attend this course are entrepreneurs. The rest are people like me who would like to get a master's degree prior to starting up their own company. As the curriculum comprises many subjects, the course could help supplement practical experience in my future business, as well as in other people's businesses. To my mind, this MBA course is a must for every entrepreneur," said U Zaw Naing Oo.

The institute has recently augmented the full-time two-year course with evening classes, expanding opportunities for would-be entrepreneurs and other people interested in business.

Students looking at studying for an MBA outside on Myanmar should be aware that

MBA programs are accredited by external bodies which provide students and employers with an independent view of their quality.

The three major accrediting bodies in the United States are Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs and the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education.

Manage your resources

By Myo Lwin

ECONOMICS is the study of how human beings allocate their limited resources to satisfy their unlimited needs and wants. That statement, made by Professor Daw Tin Hla Kyi of the Yangon Institute of Economics teaching an Executive Master of Business Administration course, sums up the entire discipline.

The professor was not just talking about money and raw materials when she used the word "resources". She was also referring to time and people.

In Myanmar we have plentiful natural resources. But our supply of human resources is not at all abundant, even though these may be the most important – and the most at risk of waste.

Only if we make the best use of the abilities and competencies of each and every one can an organisation or community remain competitive and its members motivated and productive.

Managers may grumble about how hard they find it to manage people with different levels of competence and varying needs and wants.

Human resource management in fact is always full of dilemmas.

But awareness of the basics of management is a key requirement, especially in this information age. The point is to give effect to clichés like 'Our strength is the quality of our people' or 'Our people are our most important resource'.

With the onset of this exiting year, we have numerous tasks ahead and one simple task, but not the least important, is to grasp the importance of continuously looking for better ways of managing people in an effective manner.



Spanking habits die hard

By Aye Thidar Kyaw

SPARE the rod and spoil the child, or so many parents believe – or, to put it in Myanmar terms, if you want to make a good pot you have to bang it hard and often when you make it.

But many disagree.

Parents are a child's first teachers. They convey to their children not just the values they seek to promote, but also the way they actually behave and sometimes, an awareness of the difference between the two.

"The best way to start a house is by building strong foundations. It's the same with early childhood care and development, particularly until the age of six," said U Atta Kyaw, who writes about family, marriage and children.

He added that children should learn to acquire good habits without constant admonitions from their parents.

Some parents take the advice about making pots too seriously, he says. They seem to think children grow up to be clever, obedient and successful only if regularly hit.

And some parents are overly ambitious for their children. Not content with hitting their children themselves, they tell schoolteachers: "Hit my children as often as you like," he said.

"Parents and teachers can admonish children, or even punish them. But this can be done without inflicting pain," said Daw Khin Aye Win, retired professor of psychology department at Yangon University.

"If you must hit a child, you have to explain why. But parents should try to find a better way," she added.

"People don't need to be hit. Today's society doesn't allow it, and it is not the sign of a civilised and humane parent," says U Atta Kyaw.

Life may be full of trouble and pain, but parents should not blame their children when things go wrong, he said.

"The right kind of admonition is based on love, without anger," he said.

"It's more important to help the children do the right thing in the right way without hitting them," said Ma Phyu Phyu, who has a three-year old son," he said.

If parents want their children to be brilliant, they must spend time with them – tell them stories and read books with them. Researchers have found that this helps the child's educational development. So does playing with them and talking to them, even for just one hour a day for each parent.

"If you want your kids to do well at school, don't pile too much pressure on them like some parents do. Younger children might comply, but this is not a recipe for life-long learning," said Daw Khin Aye Win.

Of course, this is easier said than done at a time when the strains and time pressures on both parents may be worse than ever.

"Today stress may be greater, and the role of grandparents is declining. The grandparents may not be educated, but they are wise and sensible and experienced, and they can talk about tradition and culture and tell the old stories. Maybe they can sometimes give better advice than some of today's parents," said U Atta Kyaw.

But parents also have to think like children, and understand how their children feel and think.

"Parents should be sympathetic when

admonishing their children," said Daw Khin Aye Win.

And today, education is linked to family happiness, experts say, pointing out that strains can arise if there is a mismatch between the educational levels of parents and children.

In the end, the best guarantee of a good education is the warmth and happiness of the family environment, they say.



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Where to study and how

By Ye Linn Htut

Myanmar's international students often fight a up-hill battle of rules, regulations and requirements when looking to study abroad. Students eager to stay abreast of the learning trends are now looking to universities in country's like Australia, Malaysia and Singapore. These country's have huge education sectors which are increasingly looking abroad to capitalise on Asia's new wealth, but for some deciding the best destination can often be a difficult decision.

A spokesperson for Crown Educational Service, U Aung Kyaw San said that whilst Thailand and Malaysia were popular for Myanmar students, Singapore is still the most popular choice.

"Parents want to send their kids to Singapore because it is close in proximity and prospers from strong economic conditions," U Aung Kyaw San said.

Apart from being a wealthy nation, Singapore has very strict rules and is renowned for being a safe country, he said.

CEO of Myanmar International Educational Centre, U Kyaw Thu said, that colleges in Singapore were popular because of two main factors, money and employment.

"The Singaporean government offers study loans to international students and they (the students) have a strong prospect

of gaining employment in Singapore when they finish their degree," he said.

The Director of the Jenko group of Education Services agreed saying that Singaporean schools offered an escape to students who were bright but did not have a lot of money to spend on their education.

The quality of educational services offered in Singapore are considered by many to be the best in Asia. Choosing the best college however often depends on the students chosen field of expertise.

Ma Naw Myo has been working in Singapore as a nursing assistant. She plans on attending the National University of Singapore (NUS) because of its strong standing in the medical community.

"Its got a great reputation for intensive research, it will really help me with my medical career," she said.

Ma Wah Wah Soe is a hotel manager also working in Singapore, she said that for her National Technological University (NTU) was defiantly the right choice.

"Walking into the campus for the first time was very exciting. For hotel management and tourism NTU was great. The professors and instructors really built up my confidence and helped me with my communication skills," she said.

Students have been flocking to Singapore also for its "polytechnic" schooling programs.

These institutions in Singapore are a

popular stepping stone into tertiary degrees at universities like NTS and NTU.

Getting access to these institutions is not always an easy task. Fortunately in Yangon recently there has been a dramatic rise in the number of educational agencies looking to prosper from the global education market.

Agencies are kept informed about changes in the industry and can often provide good advice for students unsure of their options. Education seminars hosted by industry professionals and university representatives often prove a good option for assessing different alternatives too.

"Students should use agencies who have up-to-date information, good advice and genuine intentions of seeing a student graduate from their chosen institution" Director of Smart Resources, U Nay Lin Phyto said. Smart Resources is an educational agency located in Yangon that specializes in sending students to Singapore.

"If the student is lacking some qualifications to attend the school then a good agent will tell them what they need to do to rectify this.

"Also sometimes parents have an idea for their child's education which is at odds with what their child wants to study. Agents help to ensure that both the student and the child are happy with the choice," he said.

Malaysia and Singapore compete for young brains

By James Hookyaw

KUALA LUMPUR—A few months ago, 10-year-old Ainan Cawley was looking out for high-powered sports cars on the streets of Singapore.

Now the Singaporean youngster is ogling them on the streets of Malaysia, where he has just enrolled for a three-year American degree and inadvertently added to a long-standing tussle for supremacy between two of Asia's closest but least friendly neighbors.

Ainan has a special talent when it comes to subjects like chemistry and physics. He passed a chemistry exam when he was seven that most children don't take until they are 16, and his parents say they couldn't find a sufficiently challenging school back home in Singapore.

Sensing an opportunity to generate some buzz for itself, Malaysia's HELP University College jumped in, offering Ainan a full scholarship this year and, in the process, scored some points for land-

ing the child over Malaysia's traditional rival, Singapore.

To say that Singapore and Malaysia don't get along is putting it mildly. Once conjoined as part of British-controlled Malaya, Malaysia expelled the city state from what was then the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, fearing that Singapore's mostly ethnic-Chinese population would weaken the Muslim Malay government in Kuala Lumpur.

Since then, the two countries, separated by a narrow strait, have frequently butted heads. Some observers say their sibling-like rivalry has helped propel the development of their trade-based economies, which are the most sophisticated in South-east Asia.

Now, Ainan's scholarship in Malaysia is provoking a fresh contest for bragging rights, especially in Singapore's state-controlled media, where government officials say they have bent over backward to help the boy.

—The Wall Street Journal

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Monastic education

By Cherry Thein

TO Myanmar Buddhists, the monastery is a house of religious learning, formal education and training for life based on the teachings of Buddha.

The monastic education system promotes morality and inculcates Myanmar culture in students who, typically, are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Shwe Yoe (Sir J. George Scott) in his book, *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, said monasteries were open to all alike – to the poor farmer's son as well as to the scion of princely blood. Thus every Buddhist boy in the country is taught to read and write, and in this respect at least there are but very few illiterate Burmans (Myanmar was formerly known as Burma).

This is because monasteries were the only places that rich and poor, royals and commoners attended together. They learned the "three Rs" of reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as ethics and the Buddhist way of life.

"The first books – all the books, in fact – put in the boys' hands are religious books," said Shwe Yoe. Students have to learn five fundamental precepts as well as five subsid-

iary rules of Buddhism – to refrain from taking life, stealing, conducting unlawful sexual relationships, telling lies and taking intoxicants.

This primary education must by no means be confounded with entry into the monastery as a Koyin-gale or novice. When the boy has mastered the basic religious lessons, he has to proceed to secular learning, arithmetic, religious tenets and the teachings of Buddha.

The things impressed on the youthful mind sink deep into the memory, and leave their mark on the whole future life of the young scholars. As long as these monastic schools are attended, all attacks on the Buddhist faith must be fruitless, says Shwe Yoe in his book.

The monastic education system is thought to date back to at least the Bagan era in the 10th century, with historical records indicating that King Mindon was schooled in a monastery.

In 1946, Buddhist missionaries launched a monastic education project with the aim of opening more monastic schools in Myanmar's remote mountain regions.

This program was finally formalised in 1992 with per-

mission from the government and with the expanded aim of opening monastic schools throughout the country using state-run curricula.

U Aung Thein Nyunt, the director of the Department of Promotion and Propagation for Sasana under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, said monastic schools played an important role in the daily life of Buddhists in Myanmar.

"We owe our gratitude to the monastic schools for our religious lessons, education, understanding of business, anatomy and above all our way of living as well. They are the place for propagating, preserving and protecting Theravada Buddhism in Myanmar," he said.

He said monasteries supported our education, culture and customs, and have a good relationship with the laity. They are often more effective than basic education schools because they combine state education with the teaching of Buddhist ethics under the direction of monks.

Monastic schools today especially serve orphans or children from destitute families, who can ill afford to pursue formal education. Some well-funded monastic schools also provide students with free



In this file photo taken at a Buddhist monastery in Sagaing, children still benefit from the century old schooling practices of monastic education. Pic: Myanmar Times

food and accommodation, while many others are just normal day schools.

"Buddhist monks are assigned to the border area while they study for their bachelors or masters degree offered by the government. They have to work for the propagation of Theravada Buddhism at the townships where Theravada did not develop. It is one of the reasons why monastic schools still exist," he said.

Venerable Ashin Nanda Wontha, a patron of the Suttaung Pyae (2) child development and monastic education school in Thanlyin, Yangon Division, said monastic schools especially stood for propagating Theravada Buddhism, but were also concerned to provide education to impoverished families.

"Monastic schools are concerned to teach basic ethical values and morality, and now this approach is extended to

teach state-run curricula for the benefit of all poor people," he said.

Monastic school procedures have remained unchanged, but the use of state-run curricula makes it easy for the children to enrol in state schools, he said.

According to the department, there are now more than 1400 monastic schools in 248 townships throughout Myanmar that have opened under this system.



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Harvard imparts its wisdom

U Win Phe shares his experiences with reporter Noe Noe Aung about his grand old days at Harvard University.

By Noe Noe Aung

MEMORIES of your educational experience can last a lifetime – especially if you have the good fortune to go to Harvard.

Renowned the world over as one of the pinnacles of higher education, its 370-year history and its reputation for academic excellence make Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a beacon for students not just in the United States, but from every country. Ten of those foreign students came from Myanmar.

U Win Phe, better known as U Mya Zin, got his MA in English from Harvard in 1958. Now 81 years old, he shared his memories with The Myanmar Times.

Among the things U Win Phe found most impressive was the library, which even contained books from Myanmar.

"I was so glad and proud to find those rare books in the Widener Library. Literary works that we couldn't easily find in our own country were preserved in the famous library of Harvard," said U Win Phe.

"There were around 7 million books in the Widener Library, including ancient and rare books from our country. I spent my spare time reading those books" said U Win Phe.

"And the Lamont Library played a very big part in my

student life. It was known as the Poetry Library, and had a recording room where I could listen to the voices of poets reading their favourite works," he said.

"The Myanmar government selected me and U Nyunt Wai as scholar students for Harvard when I was employed as an English tutor at Yangon University. I'd been working there six months. I didn't find language to be a barrier because I'd been working as an editor in the English section of the Yangon University magazine since 1948," U Win Phe continued.

If his knowledge of the English language was an advantage, Harvard's teaching methods also contributed a great deal to his success there. Good and clear teaching methods are one of the characteristics of Harvard, he said. The famous cartoonist Aw Pi Kyeh, U Win Naing, who got an MA in public administration from Harvard in 2002, also commended the Harvard approach.

"As at most universities, students have to rely on their own abilities. Students learn their lessons by themselves. They go to libraries and read the reference books. In class, the teachers didn't read out the lessons from a textbook. They make students discuss world affairs like policy, inflation and so on that are related to the field of study. They acted as guides, leading discussions as a key method of



Aw Pi Kyeh reflects on his challenges and achievements whilst studying abroad. He graduated from Harvard University in 2002 with an MA in public administration.

teachings," he said.

In this method, the library is a central element. That is where the students research and acquire the data they need to prepare their notes.

U Win Phe and Aw Pi

got PhD and other degrees, they really tried hard at Harvard. You couldn't necessarily tell that from their clothes or lifestyle – they enjoyed life – but they also took their studies seriously," said Aw P Kyeh.

Aw Pi Kyeh said thinking is essential for a student at Harvard, and so is academic honesty.

"You have to read what others have written, but your thinking must be your own. A real scholar doesn't copy references, but develops his or her own ideas. Developing your own idea is essential when sitting for exams at Harvard," Aw P Kyeh explained.

"I was taught to answer exam questions with the materials I'd learned by heart. But you can't do that at Harvard. You have to apply your imagination and express your own ideas. So I had to try harder than the other students, and I got more tired then them. At Harvard, I only slept about four or five hours a day," said Aw P Kyeh.

Both these Myanmar alumni of Harvard agree: "A good library is essential for a university". The library is where you find the knowledge, U Win Phe said.

As for Aw Pi Kyeh, his Harvard experience was useful for his career as a cartoonist. "A cartoonist should be friendly with the public, and needs rich experience and wide knowledge. Student life at Harvard was a wonderful

experience for me", said Aw Pi Kyeh.

Perhaps his sharpest memory was of the very first day of classes – September 11, 2001. "That's a day I'll never forget. The news came through that the World Trade Center had been attacked when we were in class. Fighter aircraft were taking off from Boston Logan airport. The university compound was full of armed soldiers and police – there were fears of terrorism everywhere. I thought classes would be cancelled, but at about 3pm, we got an email that classes would go ahead."

Cambridge

LONDON- A 14-year-old mathematics prodigy has been offered a place at Cambridge University which, if he accepts it, would make him the youngest student there for almost 230 years.

Arran Fernandez, who lives in Surrey, outside London, passed exams set by the university last year, and he now only needs to pass his A-level physics exam to enroll.

In the British educational system, A-levels are commonly taken by 18-year-old students, but Fernandez – who was home-educated – has already passed the exams in maths and further maths.

His father, Neil Fernandez, said that if he takes the place at Fitzwilliam College, he will be the youngest undergraduate at Cambridge since William Pitt the Younger studied there aged 14 in 1773 and went on to become prime minister.

"Fitzwilliam College decided to make Arran a conditional offer after considering his application very carefully," said David Cardwell, who will be teaching Arran.

"The college looks forward to welcoming Arran in October 2010 should he meet his offer, and to helping him develop and fulfill his considerable academic potential," the professor said.

Arran first hit the headlines in 2001 when he took a GCSE maths exam – normally taken by 16-year-olds – at the age of five.

"Maths has been my favorite subject for as long as I can remember," said the teenager, who aspires to become a research mathematician.

"There are a few things I want to work on," he said. "I'd like to solve the Riemann hypothesis" – a theory about the patterns of prime numbers that has baffled the greatest mathematicians for 150 years. – AFP





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Scholars be A strong CV can catapult your career

By Kyaw Thu

BE prepared – that's the advice from a veteran education adviser to Myanmar students applying for scholarships to study abroad.

Daw Nang Hom Leik, of the American Center, says students should start thinking about their application a year in advance, and should apply for as many scholarships as they can.

She said getting good TOEFL or IELTS scores, preparing a strong personal statement and securing useful recommendations are all equally important.

"Some students think getting high scores in TOEFL will enable them to get a scholarship and school admission. But it is not true. Personal statements and recommendations are also important," said Daw Nang Hom Leik said.

Stressing that competition for places was fierce, Daw Nang Hom Leik suggested that students should seize any chance to apply for a scholarship.

Ko Soe Lay, a student support service officer, agrees.

"Students should apply for all scholarships because they don't know which one they will get it and the process is very competitive," he said.

He suggests that students basically need to fulfil the general requirement of the scholarship program while they make their applications.

"They should finish high school and their first and second year at university in Myanmar in order to apply for a bachelors degree. If the students are looking for masters degree, they should finish their bachelor degree in Myanmar," he said.

Ko Soe Lay said students needed to be aware of the various deadlines of each program, and should try to find out what the program is looking for.

Apart from English skills, the personal statement and recommendations, work experience is also important.

Daw Nang Hom Leik said working for a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) cannot guarantee the student will get scholarship, as admissions committees were seeking qualified students keen to pursue higher education.

"If you are interested in something regardless of what you do, you can write down in your personal statement or motivation letter," she said.

Daw Nang Hom Leik said the American Center had recently introduced a bridging fund program that enabled Myanmar students to get assistance if they could not afford test fees, transportation charges, visa fees and other related charges.

She advised students to research college and universities that offer scholarships, apart from governmental and organisational scholarships.

By Tom Hunter

Writing a curriculum vitae (CV) can often be a daunting task. It's the first point of contact with your potential employer; a person you've never met is now about to know you're most intimate details. How does one best portray themselves on paper?

Firstly a CV is designed to show a potential employer that you are the right person for the job. It needs to be positive and leave an accurate impression on the employer, industry insiders say.

Cynda Dunkley, a human resources consultant for Executive Search, Myanmar, said that the best CV should always be brief.

"If it is not clear, concise and to the point they (the employer) will lose interest quickly," she said.

"The CV needs to be clean, neat and tidy and very easy to read, this reflects that you are organized and efficient."

The best CV's are those that can be reduced to one or two pages of worthwhile information, Dunkley said.

Dunkley believes that employers look mainly at your name, age and last position held, followed by any previous positions with relevant experience. Any certificates and relevant documents should always be placed at the back of the document.

She borrows a popular acronym borrowed from the Human Resources industry, "KISS" or keep it simple stupid, when helping people with their CV's.

Corporate English Consulting (CES), a consulting firm



An employer skims through a job hunters CV. A strong CV has the ability to really propel your career to new heights. Pic: Hein Latt Aung

based out of Thailand, said in a article published by The Bangkok Post, that the several rules should be followed when writing your CV.

CES suggests to use a uniformed tense- either past, present or future- and to keep the format simple so that the employer can evaluate it quickly. Bullet points are often a good option to summarise your achieve-

ments and personal history.

The present perfect tense is often used in a covering letter and also the follow up interview after the CV has been sent to show the candidate's employment experiences.

The one golden rule of writing a CV is to never talk badly about your previous employer, CES said.

"The recruiter may think

you will do the same about his company if the job doesn't work out," CES said.

It may also be a good idea to get some professional help with writing your CV, but you should always write the first copy yourselves.

"It helps to write the first copy initially, just so your personality shows through," Cynda Dunkley said.

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International students share their



Pan Eiswe Star,
25, Webster University
Thailand

In Myanmar I studied Korean language at the Yangon University of foreign languages. I studied there for one year and one semester. The course was a three-year BA course, but I didn't finish because I wanted to study abroad.

I decided that I wanted to go to a university with an American course structure. I chose an American

owned institution, Webster University, they have several campuses worldwide but the only one in Asia was in Thailand. This worked out well because it is close to Myanmar and my mother could come and visit me. Also the living costs in Thailand were very affordable.

I used an education agency to help me when I studied abroad in Thailand. The agent submitted all required documents to the university before I left in 2003.

I personally requested the agency to take me to Thailand as it was a little daunting traveling to Bangkok alone. I was concerned about safety traveling to a strange country as a girl, it was my first time abroad. For this service I had to pay for a separate airfare for my chaperone. This was fine because I wasn't sure about traveling by myself.

When I was in Thailand I stayed in a university house which was rented, by the university, for international students. The house was 20 minutes drive from the campus and close to the beach. This was nice because every evening I could walk along the beach near Thaksin Shinawatra's old holiday residence.

As soon as I arrived at the Uni-

versity I sat my entrance test and passed. I studied for three years at Webster University. The campus had great facilities and I made a lot of international friends who I still keep in contact with up to this day.

I finished with a Bachelor of Arts and Media Communication.—Ye Linn Htut

Nwe Nwe Oo, 25, Monash University Australia

In Myanmar I studied at Basic Education High School(2) Latha, I finished in 2000. After that I traveled to Singapore to get a higher diploma from AIT Tafe college. I needed this to help me get accepted into tertiary institutions.

I wanted to go study in Australia because I had cousins in Melbourne so my father decided that Monash University would be a good option. Monash is a huge institution and it has campuses all over the world like Malaysia and South Africa, you can even study in Italy.

I did my application through the

Monash University website. Nowadays educational agents are becoming more and more popular but I think it is more than possible to get all the right information ourselves online. I found the application process to be quite thorough but as long as you have all the right information then it's usually not a problem.

I studied in Australia for three years and really enjoyed my academic life. I really enjoyed the teaching style at the university, I was left to my own devices and I felt very independent.

The main problem I had was the cultural difference and the language barrier.

At the start of the course I could not understand a lot of what was being taught. The native accent was quite hard for me to understand, though it only took me one month to adjust. I finished with a degree in Business and Information Technology.

I've been living in Singapore for one year, it only took me one month to get a job when I got there. I used a job search website to help me find work. I chose Singapore because it has a strong economy and I also wanted to be close to my family. Australia was too far away

■ The main problem I had was the cultural difference and the language barrier. ■

from home.

I am currently working for a Singaporean company called Global Sources as a systems analyst.

— Han Oo Khin



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