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A Myanmar Times Special Feature - February 2011



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News and articles on education - 12 pages

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Want to study at Harvard or Oxford? Welcome to iTunes U

By Kyaw Thu

I'M thinking about going to Harvard next week, or maybe I'll attend a class at Stanford. But perhaps, if I have time, I'll do both.

Since finding a new web-platform that allows me to learn from some of the world's finest universities I now have the ability to study where I want, when I want and all with a click of the mouse.

iTunes U is a new website from Apple that allows users to view presentations and listen to lectures with nothing other than an iTunes account and an internet connection.

It is difficult and challenging for Myanmar students to go overseas and study, with a number of constraints sometime making it impossible. Finances, accreditations, visas and admittance issues can often dissuade potential students from taking the big step and moving away to further their education. Whilst studying in the Asian region can be easier, having access to institutions like Harvard or Berkley can be a whole other matter.

With iTunes U you don't need to bother about admittance, scholarships or competition from other students, you simply get out of it what you put in.

Set up by Apple in 2007, iTunes U is a free database where students can listen to a limitless supply of information supplied directly from the world's biggest learning

institutions.

The site - which is accessible through the iTunes Store - is a distribution facility for students studying at particular universities but also available free to those who are interested.

Some sites are restricted to a schools particular academic community but public iTunes U sites - such as those created by Yale, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Oxford, Cambridge, MIT, and broadcasters like PBS are all available free of charge.

The site provides both audio and visual content and students can subscribe to a course and receive updates when new information becomes available. The database has over 350,000 items.

According to Apple's website: "[iTunes U] is an innovative way to get educational content into the hands of students".

But with no teachers to hound you for your assignment, it must be noted that such a service is only going to benefit users if they put in the effort to learn new things. Also, the service is not an accredited form of learning and courses don't come with any recognised certificate.

But still, how often do you get the opportunity to learn from some of the best minds in the world?

So on that note I have to rush off to class. Stanford, Berkley or Harvard... I think I'll go to Yale.

Kyaw Thu is a former Diplomatic Affairs Editor at The Myanmar Times



STUDENTS take part in the ILBC arts and sciences day inside the gymnasium of the school's Tarmwe township branch on January 29. Held for the fifth time, the fair featured 120 booths with arts and science displays created by ILBC students. The school has about 1500 weekday students and 600 weekend students at its five Yangon branches, who study at the primary, secondary and IGCSE levels. Pic: Ye Linn Htut

Good parenting and education necessary for self-confidence

By Ei Ei Toe Lwin

EVERYONE needs a degree of self-confidence so how exactly does one attain it and where does it come from?

Is it something that your parents pass on to you, your teachers, or is it something that can be achieved individually?

For this article I spoke to a number of teachers to get their advice on being more confident.

Daw Myint Myint Soe, the principal of No (1) Hlaing

pre-school in Hlaing Township, Yangon Region said that: "For a child to be more self confident a child needs a mix of good parenting and education."

Arthur Atta Kyaw, the author of several books on education says that self-confidence is something that has to be cultivated from birth.

"It's an essential personal quality that has the ability to keep a person standing firmly in life," he said.

He thinks that it mainly comes from a person's parents and the sort of environment that a child is raised in. He added: "A good school is also important but this also is dependent on a child's parents."

Mr Peter Evans, a teacher at the International Language and Business Centre on Lay Daunt Kan Road, Tamwe Township, Yangon Region,

said that even if a parents send their children to a good school, this can sometimes not be enough.

"If a child gets bad marks at school or fails an exam, parents need to handle it accordingly," Mr Evans said.

Shouting and swearing is not going to produce a self-confident child, he said.

The family dynamic can also affect a child's mental state. Issues such as divorce and death have the ability to detrimentally harm a child's psyche, said the principal Daw Myint Myint Soe. She agreed saying: "Children don't spend the whole day at home, so a loving and warm family can help ones upbringing."

"Parents who listen to the feelings of their children tend to produce men and women who is self confident and a good communicator,"

she said.

Mr Peter Evans says that technology is also to blame for poor communication skills in adolescents.

"Today children spend most of their time in front of the TV and playing computer games."

"I've been to villages with no televisions or computers and children in these places have very good communication skills," Mr Evans said.

He added that strong communication skills are very important, especially when applying for jobs in later life.

"Students have to sit interviews when they apply to study abroad. Some students who get high qualifications at school fail at interviews because they are afraid or unable to speak to the interviewer," he said.

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Agents compete as students look to study abroad

By Ye Linn Htut

STUDYING at an overseas university or college can be an exciting opportunity for young Myanmar students, and their parents, but the process can often be daunting. Educational agencies can help bridge the transition and provide insightful advice on where best to study abroad.

The number of agencies in Yangon providing these services has increased from about 20, five years ago, to almost 100 today and industry sources say the rise is a reflection of the high demand for foreign education.

"Now agencies are competing against each other as more students look to go abroad," said U Aung Kyaw San, a consultant officer at Crown Education.

"Schools now commission agencies to find students the agents no longer take an additional service charge," U Aung Kyaw San added.

U Kyaw Thu, CEO of MIEC PMC International education service agency, said that this was not always the case.

"We don't get commission for all cases as some students are not honest. We send them abroad and then they fail to make contact with the school, sometimes they go to



Students on their way to classrooms in Yankin Township. Pic: Lwin Maung Maung

a cheaper school," U Kyaw Thu said.

"In that case we don't get a commission and the relationship between the school and the agent can also be affected," he said.

Relationships between the student and agent can also become tense. With a high number of agencies

operating in Yangon, some are sure to be better than others.

One student, who asked not to be named, said that he was lured to Singapore by an agency to study hospitality and tourism in "five star hotels."

"Actually I had to train in a restaurant and clean the

tells them, U Thet Win Naing said.

"Agencies should check how long a school has been open and ensure that it delivers what it promises," he said.

U Myo Thiha, the operating manager of Advance Technology and Solution Services said that most students came home happy with their experience as most agents were trying hard to better the service provided to the student.

"Today, service is very important in the industry. We apply to overseas schools for the student then arrange entrance accordingly. We also coordinate living arrangements as well as airport pick-up and transfers," U Myo Thiha said.

"We also now offer students the chance to study abroad even if they have little finances," said U Myo Thiha, Operating Manager of Advance Technology & Solution Services.

The agencies apply on the student's behalf for loans from foreign governments, and also help to arrange a stipend to cover their living costs.

"When I was young everyone would have loved to be educated abroad, but we didn't know what to do and at the time agencies

cost a lot of money," U Myo Thiha said.

Ma Nilar Win, who studied statistics in Singapore at a private school said that Singapore was a good place to study as certain visas could be granted that allowed students to work as well as study, reducing the financial burden.

"I had a visa for three years, and was allowed to work in all kinds of jobs," Ma Nilar Win said.

"As long as we tried hard to pass and sat our exams punctually there was no problems," she said.

But as students return home after their studies the looming question of employment in a country like Myanmar remains a significant point of concern.

Ma Ei Thet Hnin, who attended the Institute of Technology Education in Singapore, said that her studies abroad combined with strong motivation helped her find a job in Yangon.

"It isn't easy to get a job after studying abroad. It depends not only on the school that you went to but also the student," she said, adding that if the school was a good one but the students performed terribly in their studies then the chances of finding a job would be "hopeless."

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Children on their way to school in Pyapon township last week. Pic: Nan Tin Htwe



Customer satisfaction score drops to lowest since 2007

SINGAPORE – Singapore’s national customer satisfaction index has dropped to its lowest since 2007, when the Singapore Management University’s Institute of Service Excellence (ISES) first started measuring it.

The index now stands at 67.2, a drop of 1.5 points compared to the highest score achieved, in 2007.

The score stood at 68 last year. ISES said this is because Singapore’s operating environment has changed, and demand for services has increased with record tourist arrivals and population increase.

Another reason for the decrease is the significant drop in the scores for the finance and insurance sector, which may still be recovering from the financial crisis as they work to regain lost customer trust.

The sector carries more weight in the index as it accounts for 41.9 per cent of the sectors covered in the index due to its higher contribution to GDP.

Job vacancies have also increased, and this has made it more challenging for businesses to meet increasing consumer demands.

Interestingly, despite the drop in the national index, there is an improvement in perceived service quality, which is at its highest at 71.3.

However, ISES’s Director Caroline Lim said service quality alone does not lead to customer satisfaction and companies should look into exactly what customers want.

“While service quality does impact customer satisfaction, training the frontline service alone will not raise customer satisfaction and customers can take a more holistic approach looking at improving product quality, improving their branding and positioning, improving perception of perceived value to raise customer satisfaction.”

ISES said the retail and tourism sectors showed marked improvements, likely due to the opening of the integrated resorts and refurbishment of Orchard Road.

Healthcare, Food & Beverage, Transport and Logistics sectors’ scores did not change significantly, while the Education and Info-Communications sectors declined.

The national customer satisfaction index measures customer satisfaction across eight economic sectors. – AFP

Civil society: building a nation

By Nan Tin Htwe

SINCE Cyclone Nargis swept through southern Myanmar, civil society organisations have played a vital role restoring the livelihoods of citizens and solidifying social structures to help build the nation.

U Arthur Aung Kyaw Myint, the head of Nargis Rehabilitation Group, which formed a week after the cyclone, told *The Myanmar Times* that “the devastating cyclone left scars but brought good changes at the same time”.

Civil society is generally defined as a volunteer civic and social organisation that attempts to separate itself from commercial enterprise and state structures. Such organisations play a vital role in nation building through development, humanitarian assistance and education.

“Some young people want to be involved with state-building. If so they need the proper knowledge and skills. We offer courses on economics, development, history and international organisations,” a trainer from a Tarmwe township-based institute said

“People who come to our training sessions represent the majority of the country.

They have hard lives and do not want the next generation to face the same situation. They want a better country,” he said.

A typical English class at the training school may involve a discussion about a world leader, or the particular situation within a country, the

trainer said.

He said that whilst these discussions were important, the complexity of the topic can sometimes lead to misinterpretation.

But for U Arthur Aung Kyaw Myint’s organisation, civil society education programs can play a vital role in alleviating poverty and improving literacy.

“Some parents do not want to take their children to a village for education. So what we are seeing is a number of better and stronger facilities called reading stations set up with the support of NGO’s and INGO’s,” he said.

“Even trishaw drivers want to learn how to read, but sometimes they don’t have the money for education.” He added: “If they are not reading then they might go back to playing chess or gambling.”

One of these reading rooms in Dedaye township has been providing free book rentals to its almost 1300 members. Since it was established in June, the centre estimates that it has loaned out an average of 120 to 150 items a day.

“Some of our readers dropped out of school, but we still want them to be able to read,” U Arthur Aung Kyaw Myint said.

“In other book rental shops, they have only popular comics and romantic stories, but we provide books that give the reader something to think about. We also have old novels for adults,” he said.

Since Nargis, added emphasis has been

directed towards improving health and educating people on modern medical practices.

Dr Htun Linn Oo, coordinator of Myanmar Business Coalition (MBC) on AIDS, runs an organisation to make people become more aware of HIV/AIDS.

“Most people now know of the ways of transmission and how to use condoms. What we are also trying to do is reduce the stigma attached to people living with the disease,” he said.

“These people have rights and need a hand.”

Since 2003, MBC has opened branches in Pyay, Mandalay Monywa, Pakokku, Muse and Lashio. The centre provides advice to all sectors of society on treatment and living with the disease.

The organisation goes to several different groups and workplaces to give seminars and where appropriate send a doctor to give medical advice.

“[At these seminars] people gain knowledge and change their attitudes towards people suffering from the disease.

“At first people think that [people living with HIV] are awful but after our class they learn. They don’t change their attitude immediately but at least they are thinking.”

According to local sources, in 2009 there were almost 90 local non-government organisations and civil society groups working in various sectors.

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Monastic system complements state schools

By Cherry Thein

EVERY child in Myanmar when they reach the age of eight or nine has the opportunity to begin their education at a Buddhist monastery, or *pongyi kyaung*.

It will always be the students choice to enter the monk-hood or become a layperson but at the monastery they must all abide by the same rules set by the five universal Buddhist commandments; do not take a life, steal, have unlawful relations, tell lies or take intoxicants.

The education focuses on the tenets of religion and the teachings of the Buddha as well as the usual secular classes such as math and science.

Monastic education now bases part of its curriculum on the state program. This means that more children, regardless of religion, are able to study at the monasteries.

The venerable U Zitila, from the Thayet Taw Monastery in Lanmadaw township, said monastic education schools are aiming to attract a more inclusive class of students than in the past, so many are now offering government educations with permission from the ministries of Religious Affairs and Education.

In 1946 Buddhist missionaries in Myanmar started a monastic education project with the aim of opening more monastic schools in remote mountain regions of Myanmar, the venerable said.

This program was finally formalised in 1992 with permission from the government and with the expanded aim of opening monastic schools throughout the country using state-run curricula.

"In olden times, Christians made missionary trips to the snow-capped hills of Chin State and Kachin State. They won over locals through their humanitarian work, which included the



Novices and young students attend a lecture of a monk at Myin Tha Myo Oo Monastery in South Okkalapa township in Yangon. Pic: Cherry Thein

provision of free education. No one is to blame but us [Buddhists]; we ignored these people, and it is time to redress the balance."

Monastic schools today especially target orphans or children from destitute families, who cannot afford to pursue formal education. Some well-funded monastic schools also provide students with free food and accommodation while many others are just normal day schools.

The two ministries – the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs – collaborate to supply curricula and textbooks to interested

monastic schools, which are run under the management of a Buddhist monk.

Venerable Ashin Nanda Wuntha, a patron of the Sutaung Pyae (2) child development and monastic education school in Thanlyin township, Yangon Region, said many parents are attracted to monastic schools because they offer a good free education.

"We accept children regardless of their religion but we give them Buddhist moral lessons. But our main focus is provide students with enough schooling to help them in their later lives," he said.

Monastic education fulfills

two purposes in Myanmar; firstly it promotes the teachings of the Buddha and secondly fills a void in the state education system, which some parents can't afford.

Sitagu Sayadaw Dr Ashin Nyanissara, a leading Theravada Buddhist, said that this second role gives monastic education a humanitarian element that aims to promote literacy throughout the country.

Myanmar benefits from one of the highest literacy rates in Southeast Asia. The Ministry of Information released a report in 2007 that stated the national literacy rate for those over

the age of 15 to be 94.75 percent.

"Monasteries in the past focused on religion but now we also focus on welfare to fill the hole that state education leaves," the venerable Sitagu Sayadaw Dr Ashin Nyanissara said.

"There are many children and orphans who can not get a primary education, even though the state does try and offer education in the furthest corners of the country," the venerable said.

"In the teaching of Buddha, we, the sons of the Buddha, have to care for the welfare of laypeople and encourage filling our

ultimate aim of *nibbana* (nirvana) – the cessation of all desire, supplying education is one of the steps for goal of morality, mentally as well as intellectuality of mankind in the teaching of Buddha," the venerable added.

According to the list from the department of Promotion and Propagation for Sasana under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there are now more than 1400 monastic schools in 248 townships throughout Myanmar that have opened under this system: 1100 primary schools, 190 advanced primary schools, 112 middle schools and two high schools.

Singapore sees record visitors in 2010

SINGAPORE, Feb 10, 2011 (AFP) - Singapore welcomed a record 11.6 million visitors last year, up 20 percent from 2009, thanks to the lure of its two new casinos and robust Asian economic growth, the tourism board said on February 10.

Visitors from Indonesia, China, Australia, Malaysia and India accounted for more than half last year's arrivals, the Singapore Tourism Board said in a statement.

Arrivals from other Southeast Asian neighbours like the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam as well as Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea also grew strongly.

The board and analysts said the buoyant figures were driven by "positive economic

sentiment" in the region and the opening of two luxury casino resorts in 2010.

The huge growth was boosted after Malaysia's Genting Group in February 2010 opened its Resorts World Sentosa casino complex, featuring Southeast Asia's first Universal Studios movie theme park.

And less than three months later Las Vegas Sands threw open the doors to the Marina Bay Sands, which includes three hotel towers topped by a boat-like skypark.

The city-state's economy, with tourism a key economic earner, expanded 14.7 percent in 2010, the fastest growth in Asia as the region powers ahead after the global downturn. — AFP



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Math, tuition and me

By Khin Myat

IN his work as a civil servant, my father was often required to move from township to township. My mother, my three brothers and sisters and I would move with him. Though this could have been disruptive to our education, we found the teachers wherever we went so caring and professional that we never failed an exam.

After two or three years, my father was transferred again. Because my brother was about to sit for matriculation, my father left us in Yangon with my aunt, and we went to one of Yangon's finest schools.

That was when I found I was no good at maths.

One day, the teacher explained a mathematical procedure, and asked the class to work out three problems based on it. I did not understand the explanation. I could not solve the problems. When I asked my friend who was sitting next to me, she told me she had already solved all three. So, it seemed, had everybody else in the class.

At that point, the teacher announced that anyone who failed to work out all three problems would be punished. That was how I learned to solve the problem, by copying from my friends.

Valuable though this skill was, it left me with a fear and hatred of mathematics.

Some days I was afraid to go to school. When the maths teacher came into the class, I would break out in a cold sweat.

My friends suggested that my parents should hire a tutor. I was shocked; this was just the sixth grade. But I was told most parents did this from a very early stage.

Moving again, this time outside Yangon, I found myself in a class where I could ask the teacher to explain again if I didn't understand the problem. We were encouraged to find different ways of solving the problems. We felt intelligent. We passed exams, often with flying colours.

Back in Yangon, I was not happy at school, and told my mother. Though I passed the sixth-grade exams, she was worried enough to hire a tutor for seventh grade. My extra tuition took place in the evenings, after school and before dinner. The tutor helped me get through maths exams well enough to concentrate on other important aspects of my education, such as clothes, hair care, make-up, boys and gossip.

Later, there were tutors for reading comprehension and drawing. I sometimes wondered if my improved marks were coming at the expense of self-confidence, or creative thinking.

Years afterwards, I see not much has changed. My sister helps her second-grade son with his homework. There's a lot of impatience, shouting and crying. Then the tutor comes.

Malaysia education information centre opens in Yangon on Feb 1

By Ye Linn Htut

A LOCAL overseas education agency last week opened an information centre to provide advice to students who wish to study in Malaysia.

"We are giving information and consultation for Myanmar students who will go or want

to go to Malaysia to study under the guidance of the [Malaysian] Ministry of Higher Education," said Daw Jenny Lao, the managing director of Jenko Group of Educare Services, which opened the Malaysia Educational Information Centre on February 1.

"The service is free

of charge and we'll be providing information on universities and colleges, whether they are private or government institutes, as well as guidance on how to live in Malaysia," she said.

The centre, at 459 New University Avenue Road, has the backing of the Malaysia Education Promotion Centre, which is aiming to almost double the number of foreign students at its universities by 2015.

"By improving the quality of education [we are aiming] to attract 150,000 international students by 2015 and become an education hub for Asia," said Mr Helmy Sulaiman, education attaché of Malaysia Education Promotion Centre based in Vietnam.

Mr Sulaiman added that Malaysian institutes were also considering investing in private education in Myanmar for all ages, without providing any further details.

In excess of 400 Myanmar students enroll in higher education in Malaysia each year - a minuscule portion of the 80,000 international students that study at the 20 government and 50 private universities, colleges and institutes in Malaysia.

About 10 overseas education agencies in Yangon have links with Malaysian providers.

Daw Su Su Hlaing, managing director of Myanmar Search International, on Shwe Bon Thar Street, Kyauktada township, said: "The cost of living in Malaysia is between US\$300 to \$450 [a month] at least, but it depends on the students. Tuition fees are \$20,000 to \$70,000 for a three-year bachelor degree program and \$10,000 to \$40,000 for a postgraduate degree."



A student looks at the camera at a government school for the disabled in Mayangone township in Yangon. Pic: Kyaw Zin Tun

Schools should not foster a sense of isolation

By Zon Pann Pwint

HOW special should special education be? Should children with disabilities all be educated together, away from "normal" children? Or could they learn more - about integration into society, for instance - by going to school alongside other children?

Does special education require special schools?

"To a certain extent," says U Hta Oke, managing director and founder of the Eden Centre for Disabled Children in Insein township.

Some experts believe that the constant effort of integration required of a disabled child at a normal school can harm his or her education. That's why special schools for disabled children were first conceived.

"It has recently been concluded that the disadvantages of special schools outweigh the advantages in terms of the social relationships of each child," said U Hta Oke.

"After years of learning at special schools without contact with the outside world, children with disabilities can feel strange to be in society, and find it difficult to integrate," he adds.

Schools should not foster a sense of isolation and create a gap between the disabled and everybody else.

"That's why we don't provide much encouragement to the special schools. But they are still essential for those with severe learning difficulties or impairment," he says.

"Our aim is to create a more inclusive society, so that the disabled can enter mainstream education," he adds.

At present, about 80 disabled students out of 160 from the Eden Center are undergoing formal education at 35 state schools in nine townships around Insein.

"Children do not have an attitude of discrimination. They are often very good at integrating into new surroundings or making

new friends. So disabled children are taught to study with normal children from an early age in the same school," said U Hta Oke.

Normal children also benefit from this approach. When they are used to having friends with disabilities, they do not regard "the disabled" as strange.

"Prolonged separation of the disabled from society can make a normal person feel uncomfortable when they meet the disabled, and even to avoid them. They don't know how to deal with them," he adds. Inclusive education will help normal children understand what it's like to be disabled.

Dr Htar Htar, founder of Star Fish Centre for Disabled Children in East Dagon, agrees that there are weaknesses in their socialisation if they have been living in the seclusion of their own special schools from an early age.

"Some children with cerebral palsy cannot walk and find difficulty in holding a pencil properly, so they cannot attend state schools like normal children. They are sent to special schools that cannot provide higher education, much less contact with the outside world," Dr Htar Htar said.

Some children with cerebral palsy are just as intelligent as any other child. It's only the physical effects of the disease that make writing, speaking and walking difficult for them. With the help of physiotherapy, they can attend state school.

"That doesn't mean it's easy. If a child has a hearing difficulty, the school has to appoint a teacher who knows sign language, or the school might have to provide special transport or wheelchair access for children unable to walk," she says.

Not all problems can be solved by volunteers and donors. The government and local authorities also have their responsibilities, the doctor says.

"Inclusive education intends children to socialise with others. The disabled learn from normal children, and normal children can learn from their classmates with disabilities as well. Both will better understand the situation of the disabled."

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Hunger stunts Philippine children

MANILA - A third of Philippine school children are stunted because poverty has forced them to eat too little food for years, according to a government study released last week.

The latest findings of a rolling survey carried out for decades by the government's Food and Nutrition Research Institute reflect the general poverty rate and the boom-and-bust economic cycles of the country.

The latest data, which is for 2008 but was only released on February 3, showed 33.1 percent of 100,000 students surveyed across the country suffered from chronic malnutrition.

This was due to them not eating enough food over a long period and led to them being shorter than they should be, although the survey did not publish specific heights.

"Being underheight is a result of a long period of inadequate nutrition," Eva Goyena, a science research specialist at the institute, said on February 4.

The chronic malnutrition rate had risen slightly from 32pc in 2005, the last time the survey was carried out,

This is really inadequate because rice is mostly carbohydrates for energy."

but was down from a high of 44.8pc recorded in 1990.

The 2008 study found that Philippine students aged between six and 12 consumed an average of 599 grams of food a day.

Half of the food was steamed rice, while 76 grams were fish and 33 grams were milk products.

"This is really inadequate because rice is mostly carbohydrates for energy and there are more protein-rich foods than fish," Goyena said.

She said a long-term diet of this type would lead to the child becoming stunted.

The malnourished children were deficient in key nutrients such as iron, Vitamin A, calcium and iodine, according to Goyena.

Chronic malnutrition begins in infancy, the study suggested, with more than eight in 10 Philippine toddlers aged between six months and five years not eating enough to meet the recommended daily energy and nutrient intake.

Acute malnutrition, which reflects more recent setbacks such as illness or failing to eat properly over the past week, stood at 25.6pc in 2008 among school children, up from 22.8pc in 2005. — AFP

Free tuition for disabled students

By Cherry Thein

THREE non-governmental organisations are collaborating to offer free tuition for matriculation students with disabilities, for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Ah Pyone Kaba, Tet Lan and Su Paung Aar Myant, all of which are managed by disabled people, represent visually impaired people, the physically handicapped, and those who have been disabled in accidents.

U Zaw Lin Htun, a member of Su Paung Aar Myant, told *The Myanmar Times*: "At first we offered tuition for middle-school students only, but now we have three volunteers who can teach high school as well. So we're expanding the program for 2011."

Though all children have the right to state education, some children with disabilities face practical difficulties in attending school, as well as some psychological barriers.

The three groups want people with disabilities to recognise that they can make a contribution to society, he said.

"The government helps disabled children by providing inclusive education, but in



A child looks at the computer screen as a blind man uses the Google Chat program at the School for the Blind in Kyeemyindaing township last month. Pic: Hein Latt Aung

practical terms they are psychologically defeated, and need help in participating in school work," said Zaw Lin Htun.

Society still regards people with disabilities as dependent on the able-bodied, and people don't consider that they can lead useful lives,

he said.

"We live at home feeling inferior, excluded from society and dehumanised. We don't want the new generation to suffer in the same way and we want to help them live bravely in society. Children with disabilities can see that the

people who are helping them are themselves disabled," said U Zaw Lin Htun, who himself is blind.

U Than Zin Win, of Ah Pyone Kaba, who was left handicapped by childhood polio, said the program helps not only the children, but also their families who live

with disability.

"We are different in physical appearance from others, but our capacity to learn is the same as theirs. We want to change attitudes and increase awareness," he said, adding that rehabilitation for the disabled was expanding in the country.

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Young people see jobs in tourism boom

By Ye Linn Htut

THE lure of job opportunities, both in Myanmar and overseas, has drawn increasing numbers of applicants for hotel and tourism training courses, industry sources say.

Amid hopes that the tourism industry, after two years of solid growth, is set to take off, local hotels are increasingly on the lookout for better-trained staff. But they are also competing with hotels from abroad for the best graduates.

"In 2005, the number of applicants attending our course over the whole year was only about 200," Daw Nay Yi Aung, managing director of Star Resources Hospitality Management Academy in Sanchaung township, told *The Myanmar Times* late last month. "That number increased to 500 in 2006, 800 in 2007 and reached its highest point of more than 1000 in 2008. However, it fell back to 800 the following year because of the recession but we saw a slight increase in numbers in 2010."

"Applicants have a range of aspirations. Some want to go abroad and some want to operate their own hotel here. Restaurants are also interested in graduates of hotel and tourism training courses, and hotels in Nay

Pyi Taw are asking us to send our graduates to them for interviews," she said.

Daw Myo Myo Maw, coordinator at Santini International Training Academy in Kyauktada township, said enrolment applications were steady in 2011, but had been increasing for the past three years.

"We have at least 20 applicants for each course. Although there is growth potential in the local tourism industry, requests for graduates from [Dubai] are temporarily on hold," she said.

"Some hotels send their employees to our training centre to attend upgrading programs. This year there are more applicants who want to make a career [in the tourism and hospitality industry]. The age range is 20-35."

Increasingly, restaurants in Yangon are also looking for trained staff. Captain Ko Myo Min, of Korean restaurant The Seoul, said up-market eateries with a foreign clientele required staff proficient in English.

"We have more foreign customers, and we concentrate on good personal appearance, English proficiency and customer relations. So we contact these private training centres to choose well-trained graduates," he said.

Staff undergoing on-



A receptionist greets a guest with a broad smile at Parkroyal Hotel in Yangon. Pic: Kay Thidar Myint Thein Pe

the-job training at local restaurants and hotels are paid about K25,000 to K35,000 a month, while permanent staff usually get K40,000 to K70,000. Those who find work abroad, usually in the Middle East, can expect a basic salary of about US\$400 a month.

Consequently, only 40 percent of graduates find work locally, with the remaining 60pc heading abroad, sources said.

"Our centre helps graduates find jobs, mostly in country. Most graduates want local experience before they go abroad. The new hotels in Nay Pyi Taw are looking for well-trained graduates, and sometimes we don't have enough to meet their demand," said Daw Myo Myo

Maw.

In Nay Pyi Taw, approximately 20 hotels have already opened and about the same number are under construction.

To meet demand from these new hotels, Yangon-based Classic International Group has opened three branches in Nay Pyi Taw over the past six months, offering courses on hotel cleaning, occupational health and safety and other hospitality subjects.

Students are drawn from the surrounding region, including Magwe, Meiktila, Pyawbwe, Pinyinman, Lewe and Tatkon townships, chairman U Win Htein said.

"Oatarathiri Hotel and Shwe Pyi Taw Hotel send their employees to our centre for English proficiency and

housekeeping courses," said U Win Htein.

Foreign hotels usually recruit trained Myanmar staff through local employment agencies, rather than direct from the training courses.

"Some foreign hotels demand many graduates [of hospitality training programs], and they prefer those with training to those with experience alone," the director of one overseas employment agency said. "The salaries they offer are quite high, at least US\$400."

Among those looking for foreign employment is Ma Shwe Sin Myint, who comes from Sagaing Region but has lived in Yangon for the past four years.

"My main objective is to

go abroad and over the past year I have attended classes in English, housekeeping and [food and beverage handling]. I passed the interview for Sofitel [in Dubai], which pays a very high basic salary of \$500," she said.

Others are still in the process of landing a job abroad.

"Now I'm studying hotel management. I completed a European and Eastern culinary course at Kandawgyi Palace Hotel training centre and in 2008 worked as a kitchen assistant at Mya Yeik Nyo Hotel," said Ko Moe Thiha Ko, who is working at Coffee Circles on Dhammazedi Road in Sanchaung township while he completes his training.

- Translated by Yamon Phu Thit

Language sector plays important role in Myanmar

By Ye Linn Htut and Thae Thae Htwe

MYANMAR'S population is now seeing the benefits associated with learning a second language and as regional trade grows, more and more languages are now being taught throughout the nation.

English remains the most popular language due to Myanmar's colonial heritage as well as being the most widely spoken language worldwide. There are over 400 million people worldwide who use English as their mother tongue, 600 million people speak English as a second language and an additional 100 million people use English as a foreign language.

English teacher, KT U Tint Lwin, 69, has seen an increase in English fluency in Myanmar and estimates the total number of people who have learnt the language at some point in their lives to be around 90 percent.

"English is needed not only in Myanmar but for all citizens," KT U Tint Lwin said. He added: "There are many books written in English and whenever we want to study a new subject we have to study in English."

"English is only going to become more important for Myanmar people, especially with the new government. As we open up to the international community we need to be able to speak their language," he said.

"If Myanmar wants to expand,



Teachers at PIEC private teaching centre in Yangon encourage students reading international publications in English language. Pic: Aye Zaw Myo

we need to better our grasp of English."

The Oxford dictionary lists over 250,000 English words. KT U Tint Lwin says that to attain a level of basic fluency at least 1500 words must be learnt and around 3000 different sentences.

The growing demand for Myanmar migrant workers and increased trade with Asian neighbours has also seen a rise in languages such as Thai, Korean, Chinese and Japanese.

After English, Chinese is the second most widely spoken foreign

language in Myanmar. The country's proximity to China and strong bilateral ties has seen a dramatic rise in the amount of Chinese companies operating in Myanmar.

"The number of Chinese companies has increased in Yangon and so has the demand for speaking the language," a teacher from Golden Education Sharing Centre, Ma Myat Su Naing said.

"Chinese Schools became popular about 10 years ago. In the past there were Chinese Temples to learn the language.

"Now what we are seeing is more and more kids starting to learn Chinese from pre-school, especially in places like Lashio and Muse where ethnic Chinese are predominant," Ma Myat Su Naing said.

Myanmar students are increasingly looking to regional neighbours for education opportunities.

To study in a country like South Korea, a grasp of Korean is essential.

Since 2003, the South Korean Embassy in Yangon, has been hosting Korean language contests at the

Sedona Hotel.

First prize each year is a full scholarship to study at the University of Korea.

"Holding competitions promotes interest in Korean language," said Mr Kwon Jae Hwan, the first secretary and consul from the South Korean Embassy.

The number of contestants taking part each year has been steadily increasing. In 2009 there were 21 contestants but last year that number jumped to 43.

The number of people able to work in Korea has increased since 2007 because of the nation's new Employment Permit System, a program designed to provide eligible workers to South Korea. In order to qualify for the program, workers are tested on their Korean language skills.

Since Myanmar opened its doors to international tourism, the Japanese have flocked to the country eager to experience a culture once off limits to travellers. As tourism numbers grow, so too does the need for guides proficient in Japanese language.

U Kyaw Min Htin, the managing director of Better Life and Myanmar Polester language school in Yangon, said that he had almost 3000 students sit the Japanese language course last year. "That figure is increasing by 30-40pc each year," he said.

To study Japanese in Yangon costs around K40,000 for a three month course.

Beating ban stirs debate in South Korean schools

By Jung Ha-Won

SEOUL — With the new school year starting in March, high school teacher Jennifer Chung is worried about coping without her longtime classroom companion — a hickory stick for smacking misbehaving students.

"I don't know if I can survive the jungle of 40 restless boys in each class, let alone keeping them quiet with no means to punish them," said the 36-year-old maths teacher in Gyeonggi province surrounding Seoul.

Education authorities in Seoul, the country's largest school district with 1.36 million pre-college students, last November banned corporal punishment.

Gyeonggi and one other province followed suit, with the new rule to take effect there in March.

The move has sparked intense debate in South Korea, where education is highly valued and physical punishment has long been tolerated -- if not encouraged -- to discipline students and push them to excel.

Entry to a prestigious college or university largely determines a career path and even marriage prospects. So parents and teachers often drive children to work harder through physical pain.

Slapping or spanking is a common punishment for missing homework, performing poorly in exams or chatting too loudly during class.

Children breaking school rules may be ordered to do push-ups, hold their arms straight above their heads or walk the playground in a squatting position known as a "duck-walk".

One survey showed about 70 percent of high school students experience corporal punishment. But injuries from severe beatings have sometimes led to bitter lawsuits filed by parents and jail terms for teachers.



South Korean students sitting in a classroom during their graduation ceremony at a high school in Seoul on February 9. Pic: AFP

Kim Dong-Seok, a spokesman for the Korean Federation of Teachers Unions, said overcrowded classrooms and pressure to get students into good colleges prompt educators to rely on tough and quick discipline.

"With about 40 students in each class and all parents demanding that their children go to good colleges, you just can't do the job without physical punishment," he said.

Each class in South Korean schools has 35.3 students on average, one of the highest among OECD member countries whose average is 23.9.

"It's the parents who still want teachers to use physical methods to make their children fare better in exams," Kim said.

But a four-minute video clip of a Seoul elementary school classroom made public in July ignited a debate that for long was the preserve of minority groups of liberal teachers and parents.

Seoul's education office, headed by a newly-elected former liberal education activist, seized on the public fury to ban all corporal punishment in schools later that year.

"Corporal punishment is barbaric, inhumane and often used by teachers simply to

release their own anger. What's worse, it makes youngsters take violence in everyday life for granted," said Cho Shin, a spokesman for the office.

"No one had mustered the courage to put an end to this vicious, longstanding cycle. But now is the time to end it, no matter how tough it is doing so," he told AFP.

Teachers, however, say the sudden policy switch leaves them with few disciplinary alternatives.

"Some really rebellious kids already taunt me when I try to scold them for chatting too loudly during a class, saying 'Should I take out my cell phone?' or 'Now you're not supposed to hit me, are you?'" said one Seoul high school teacher who declined to be named.

Kim of the teacher's union said complaints had poured in from teachers since last year -- especially from women teachers who said they were harassed or beaten by students in response to scolding.

"We know times have changed and we shouldn't be hitting the students. But we really need other ways to punish those flouting rules and disrupting classes," he said.

Options suggested by the education office -- summoning parents or sending students to

special self-reflection classes -- are little real use, he said, given the lack of special instructors and no clear guidance for parents.

Students are equally divided. A private survey last month of 23,000 middle and high school students showed about 50 percent support corporal punishment in classrooms while 40 percent are opposed and 10 percent undecided.

The national education ministry last month tried to ease the controversy by allowing punishment that involves no beating such as push-ups. But Seoul's education office pledged to stick with the all-out ban, further confusing teachers.

"We are in the middle of a messy, chaotic transition," said Kim Chang-Hwan, a researcher at the Korean Educational Development Institute.

The researcher said the pervasive military culture under army-backed rule through the 1960s-1980s played a role in highlighting physical discipline in education, which should vanish eventually.

"This may be the price South Korean schools must pay for relying too much on physical punishment instead of using it as the last resort," he said. — AFP

Yale University joins march to Singapore

By Simeon Bennett and Oliver Staley

YALE University plans to set up its first foreign campus in Singapore to gain a foothold in a region that provides some of its brightest students, while the liberal-arts institution brings the Yale brand in Singapore's quest to build a regional centre of learning, Yale Provost Peter Salovey said.

Three of every 10 higher-education students worldwide now enrol in Asian colleges, according to the United Nations.

"There is no doubt that the future of Yale and other great universities is to have a global presence," Salovey said. "We would like to be in parts of the world that represent important crossroads with increasingly thriving intellectual cultures."

Yale would join Duke University, the University of Chicago, Imperial College London and France's INSEAD among colleges to set up a campus in Singapore, a nation that restricts public speech and controls information in the media and on the Internet. The city-state of 5 million people, with an area smaller than New York City, wants to attract 150,000 international students by 2015, increasing the contribution education makes to Singapore's gross domestic product to 5 percent, from 3.2pc last year.

"Education is not very sexy when we compare it to the export of electronics or pharmaceuticals, but it's beginning to be one of those important small areas which is providing a source of future growth," said Song Seng-Wun, an economist at CIMB Research in Singapore.

Yale, in New Haven, Connecticut, signed a memorandum of understanding in September with the National University of Singapore (NUS) to build the 1000-student college, scheduled to open in 2013.

Sixteen colleges in other countries have a presence in Singapore, attracting 86,000 students from 120 nations

in 2007, according to the government's Economic Development Board.

The Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School started classes in 2007, and Imperial College London said last month it planned to set up a medical college at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, creating the British university's first foreign campus. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, said in January it will help set up the new, publicly funded Singapore University of Technology & Design.

NUS ranked 31st in this year's survey of universities by London-based QS Quacquarelli Symonds. Yale was third, trailing the University of Cambridge in Britain and Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, NUS partner Duke is based in Durham, North Carolina.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development's 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment, released December 7, ranks Singapore fifth of 65 countries and regions, 12 places above the United States. Asia took four of the top five slots in the survey, which rates the performance of 15-year-olds.

A 2008 statement from Singapore's education ministry said a liberal-arts college would "inject more diversity into the publicly funded university sector." Last year, 78pc of Singapore's graduates were from science, medicine, engineering, technology or business backgrounds, according to education ministry data.

"A Yale-style liberal-arts college, whose entire purpose is to get people to question and criticize everything, is very much a change," said Ann Florini, director of the NUS Centre on Asia & Globalisation.

Yale President Richard Levin and Salovey said on September 12, 2010, in an eight-page prospectus to Yale's faculty that "of special concern in an international venture of this type is the degree of academic freedom for faculty and students." — Bloomberg

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Getting into Harvard easier than McDonald's University in China

SHANGHAI — Zhou Xiaobu runs from one end of a table to another, grasping a piece of a puzzle she and her team are assembling as part of a leadership training exercise for McDonald's managers.

"Go, go, go," yells their Taiwanese teacher, exhorting them to work for the prize, a box of Danish butter cookies, for being the first to build the company's trademark Golden Arches. Above their heads is a sign that reads: "Learning today, leading tomorrow." The thick green binders stuffed with paperwork on each of the 31 students' desks indicate the next activity may not be as rousing.

This is McDonald's Hamburger University in China, and it can be harder to get into than Harvard.

Zhou's classroom, with its gray walls and carpet, is one of seven in the management training center occupying the 20th floor of the 28-story building on the outskirts of Shanghai that houses McDonald's China headquarters. The art consists of pictures of McDonald's products and equipment, such as a milkshake maker from the 1950s.

The 16,846 square foot (1565 square meters) facility doesn't have a pool or a gym and its one-room library holds books with titles such as "Just Listen," "Personal Accountability"

and "None Of Us Is As Good As All Of Us: How McDonald's Prospers By Embracing Inclusion and Diversity."

There's a coffee machine in the corridor. There's no cafeteria, although students and staff can order food delivered to the office pantry one floor down.

"I'm thrilled and proud to attend Hamburger University," said Zhou, who in 2007 started as a management trainee in the central Chinese city of Changsha, a job for which she and seven others were among 1000 applicants. That's a selection rate of less than 1 percent, lower than Harvard University's record low acceptance rate last year of about 7pc, according to the school's official newspaper.

To get to the training center, Zhou competed with 43 other workers at her store to be made first assistant manager. She didn't pay any tuition; it cost McDonald's about US\$1520 to put her through the five-day course.

The world's biggest restaurant operator moved the training center from Hong Kong last year as it expands in mainland China, where its market share is less than half of KFC owner Yum Brands. McDonald's opened a record 165 restaurants in 2010 and will accelerate that growth this year to meet its goal of 1000 new outlets in the four



Students walk past a statue of Ronald McDonald at Hamburger University in Shanghai. Pic: Bloomberg

years through 2013.

"They are preparing a base that will allow them to accelerate that rate of expansion," said Peter Jankovskis, co-chief investment officer of Oakbrook Investments,

which holds about 300,000 McDonald's shares. "They may well have announced a conservative store opening target and their true plan is much greater."

The school last year trained 1000 of the

almost 70,000 employees McDonald's has mainland China, a region that doesn't include Hong Kong, Macau or Taiwan.

Another 4000 people will attend classes at the training center through 2014, said Susanna Li, the head of the training center. The classrooms are equipped for simultaneous translation into English, Mandarin and Cantonese to accommodate students from Hong Kong and teachers from overseas.

"We'll make sure the people pipeline is ready," Li said. "Having the school here in China helps us provide training faster than sending students to Hong Kong."

Total sales for fast-food chains in China rose 12pc last year, according to London-based researcher Euromonitor International. Yum's restaurants, which include Pizza Huts as well as KFCs serving fried chicken alongside Chinese dishes, accounted for 40pc while McDonald's had 16pc, the researcher said.

McDonald's set up its first Hamburger University in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, in 1961 to train managers as well as franchise owners. McDonald's Chief Executive Officer Jim Skinner, who was paid \$17.6 million in 2009, started as a management trainee in 1971 after serving in the Navy, according to the company's website.

Getting into the school is

competitive because more than 26pc of China's 6.3 million college graduates were unemployed as of July 1, according to the Ministry of Education. That compares with a 4.2pc unemployment rate for China's urban workforce, according to data compiled by Bloomberg news agency.

Sun Ying, 25, started working part-time for McDonald's in 2005 during her freshman year as a tourism management major at East China Normal University. When she graduated in 2008, she opted to work full-time for the hamburger chain instead of applying for a job at a bank as her father advised.

The restaurant chain "offers many career opportunities," said Sun, who in April was made store manager at McDonald's Xinhualian store in Shanghai's central Huaihai Road. "I'm even happier to continue to grow with my team," said Sun, who's seen the number of people she supervises grow to 55 from 45 since her promotion.

Sun said she's due for more training next month: a one-week course on "business leadership practices." Her next goal is to be made operations consultant, which involves supervising a group of stores.

"Now my father has stopped trying to persuade me to work in banking," she said.

— The Washington Post

Exiled Belarusian uni too liberal for Lukashenko

VILNIUS, Latvia — Students at a Belarusian university in exile in Lithuania's capital Vilnius met US Senator John McCain earlier this month, during his visit to a school that symbolises defiance against Belarus's authoritarian regime.

Regarded as too Western and liberal by Belarusian strongman President Alexander Lukashenko, the European Humanities University (EHU), a private university founded in Minsk in 1992, was forced to close its doors in the summer of 2004. It moved to Vilnius the next year.

"Young people who come to study here have really thought things out. They don't want to be at a Belarusian state university where everything is controlled by an ideology," explains Almira Ousmanova, head of the EHU media and information department.

This year, 1900 undergraduates are enrolled in courses ranging from political science to history, art and journalism.

"In Belarus, when speaking about humanities, it is not so easy to speak on some topics.

For example, to speak about gay and lesbians rights," says student Aliaksandra Ihnatovich.

"All the time, you speak about problems that exist in Belarus, and of course it is not comfortable for the authorities to have students and specialists who have this critical approach," says Ihnatovich who works as a correspondent for the independent Belsat TV station, also operating in exile.

She insists that by studying at EHU she enjoys the kind of freedom of expression that is unimaginable inside Belarus.

The Belarusian KGB secret police have questioned her during visits home.

"They asked me to come to them and to have a conversation with them. I should answer their questions, about my studies, my work for Belsat, why I am here, who is studying here," she said.

Re-elected on December 19 for a fourth term in office claiming 80 percent voter port, Lukashenko who has been in power since 1994 in ex-Soviet Belarus, ordered a brutal crackdown on his

pro-democracy opponents who accused him of election fraud.

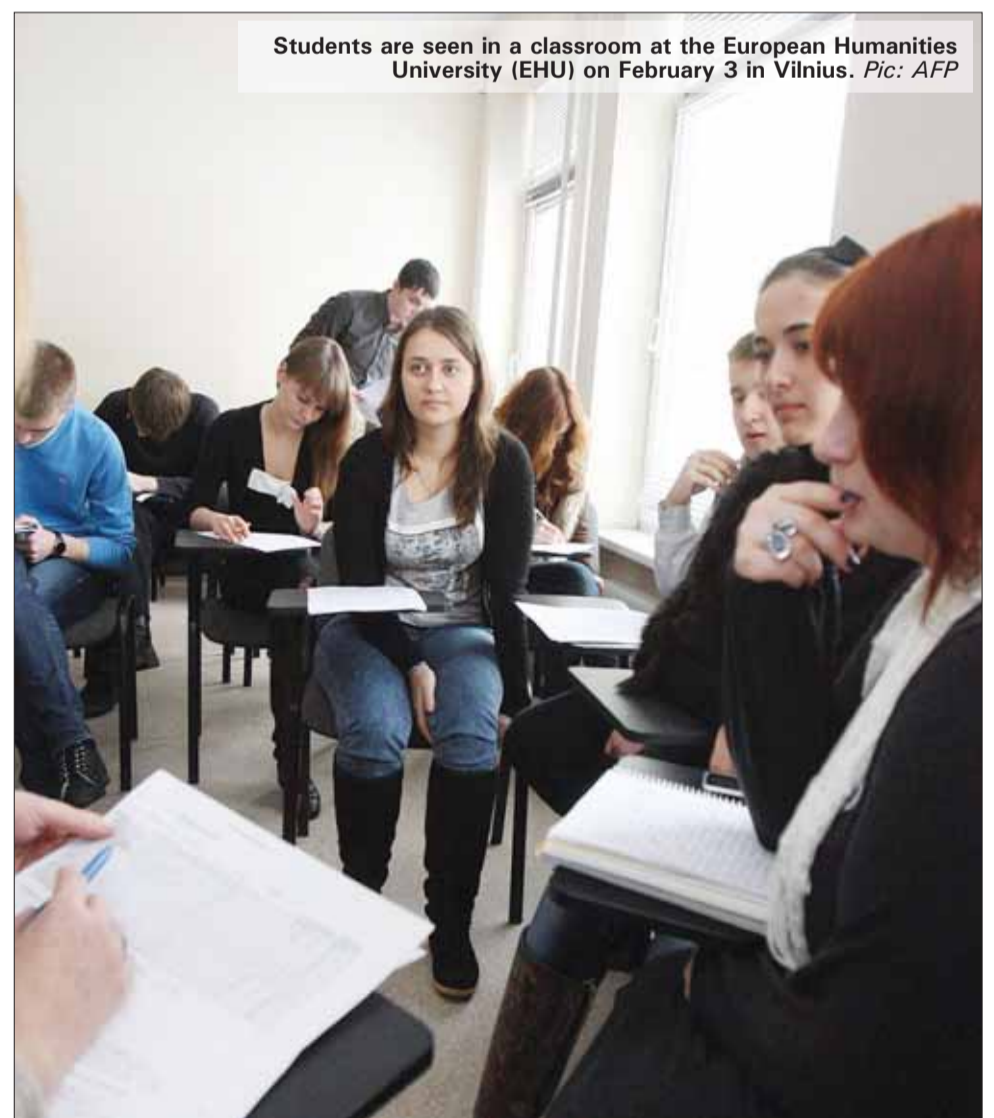
Belarusian students made this the talking point of their meeting with former US presidential candidate, Republican Senator John McCain and the US delegation also including US Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman and a dozen Congressmen in the Lithuanian Parliament on February 4.

"The European Union gives Lukashenko too much credit," contends Almira Ousmanova. "He isn't interested in changing and you just have to accept that Belarus will not become more democratic so long as he is there," she insists.

Ousmanova is convinced the university will remain in exile in Vilnius - just 200 kilometres (124 miles) from the Belarusian capital Minsk - for a long time to come.

The university relies on international donors for financing. The European Commission and 13 EU member states including host Lithuania are committed supporters.

— AFP



Students are seen in a classroom at the European Humanities University (EHU) on February 3 in Vilnius. Pic: AFP



Pakistani student Ibrahim Shahid speaks during an interview with AFP at the private Beacon House School in Islamabad on February 1, 2011. Pic: AFP

Teen breaks O-Level record

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — A Pakistani school boy has smashed a world record by getting 23 A grades in his O Levels, taking inspiration from the controversial father of Pakistan's atomic bomb who is hailed a national hero. Ibrahim Shahid, 17, the son of a university professor of electrical engineering and educated at the private Beacon House School in Islamabad, set the record last month by achieving 23 As in 24 subjects in the Cambridge exam. "It's a recognition for my country. This has never been done at O Level," he said earlier this month, dutifully thanking his parents and teachers. "My teacher in Australia told my father, 'Mr Shahid your son is an average student and he never can excel,' and then I decided to prove myself," he said, in reference to two years

he spent in Australia at primary school. Shahid has yet to decide what to study at university, but said he is drawn to physics and economics, wanting to do something to help his homeland, teetering on the edge of economic meltdown and beset by poverty. "I want to do something for my country - something unique," he said. He confessed to being "worried" about Pakistan, which suffers a critical "brain drain" of talent to the West. Shahid said he takes inspiration from Abdul Qadeer Khan, widely hailed a hero in Pakistan, but reviled in the West after he confessed in 2004 to selling nuclear secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea. Until February 2009, Khan was subject to a house of arrest for operating a

nuclear proliferation ring, but Washington says he still represents a risk. "I'm impressed by Doctor Qadeer Khan. I want to serve my country. "The future generation has to believe in hard work. They should not be disheartened. They should work hard to make the impossible possible," he said. The Cambridge O Level is an internationally recognised qualification for children aged 14 to 16, as part of preparation for university entrance and before end of school examinations. It is designed especially for the international market and students whose first language may not be English. Shahid's teacher Qurat-Ul-Ain welcomed his achievement as a rare piece of good news and a "message of hope" for Pakistan's future. — AFP

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KMD

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Junk food diet linked to lower IQ in later life: study says

PARIS — Toddlers who have a diet high in processed foods may have a slightly lower IQ in later life, according to a British study described as the biggest research of its kind. The conclusion, published on February 7, comes from a long-term investigation into 14,000 people born in western England in 1991 and 1992 whose health and well-being were monitored at the ages of three, four, seven and eight-and-a-half. Parents of the children were asked to fill out questionnaires that, among other things, detailed the kind of food and drink their children consumed. Three dietary patterns emerged: one was high in processed fats and sugar; then there was a "traditional" diet high in meat and vegetables; and finally a "health-conscious" diet with lots of salad, fruit and vegetables, pasta and rice. When the children were eight-and-a-half, their IQ was measured using a standard tool called the Wechsler Intelligence Scale. Of the 4000 children for which there were complete data, there was a significant difference in IQ among those who had had the "processed" as opposed to the "health-conscious" diets in early childhood. The 20 percent of children who ate the most processed food had an average IQ of 101 points, compared with 106 for the 20pc of children who ate the most "health-conscious" food. "It's a very small difference, it's not a vast difference," said one of the authors, Pauline Emmett of the School of Social and Community Medicine at the University of Bristol. "But it does make them less able to cope with education, less able to cope with some of the

things in life." The association between IQ and nutrition is a strongly debated issue because it can be skewed by many factors, including economic and social background. A middle-class family, for instance, may arguably be more keen - or more financially able - to put a healthier meal on the table, or be pushier about stimulating their child, compared to a poorer household. Emmett said the team took special care to filter out such confounders. "We have controlled for maternal education, for maternal social class, age, whether they live in council housing, life events, anything going wrong, the home environment, with books and use of television and things like that," she said. The size of the study, too, was unprecedented. "It's a huge sample, it's much, much bigger than anything anyone else has done," she said. Emmett said further work was needed to see whether this apparent impact on IQ persisted as the children got older. Asked why junk food had such an effect, she suggested a diet that was preponderantly processed could lack vital vitamins and elements for cerebral development at a key stage in early childhood. "A junk food diet is not conducive to good brain development," she said. The paper appears in the peer-reviewed Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, published by the British Medical Association. — AFP

Singapore brands as famous as Louis Vuitton on social media

SINGAPORE — Local firms using Facebook and other social media to market themselves are garnering brand recognition on a par with luxury heavyweights like Gucci and Louis Vuitton, a study showed February 10. Findings by research firm Firefly Millward Brown showed Singapore retail chains being identified alongside famous international labels as the most recognisable brands. Social media users in Singapore placed yoghurt chain Soghurt and local grooming firm Juup Nails alongside famous names such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Adidas in terms of brand recognition, the study

showed. "Soghurt's got three outlets in Singapore, how did that get up against Gucci, Sony, who spend millions... every year around the world and have done so for years?" said Nichola Rastrick, managing director of Millward Brown in Singapore. The company's Priti Mehra said Soghurt's social media success was due to its effective use of the popular platform to engage its consumers in a two-way conversation. "If you go to their Facebook page, you see them engaging with consumers in real time about flavours, about their offers," she told AFP. "And I think that makes a big difference, that a brand which is so small, without too much spent, gets as much space as a brand which is so big." Mehra added that social media had a "democratisation" effect on brand marketing, as its success did not hinge on financial clout common in more traditional advertising platforms like television and print commercials. "I think to a certain extent, what that means is that it's a level playing field. As long as your content is relevant, as long as you're engaging with the consumers in the right way, consumers are going to pay attention to you," she said. — AFP

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A teacher supervises kids at ILBC learning centre in Yangon. Pic: Lwin Maung Maung

Computers develop visual skills for kids

By May Sandy

REGARDLESS of age in today's modern society, using a computer is basically inevitable.

School kids these days sit in front of their computers for hours; either working productively or withering away their day on Facebook and Twitter.

Daw Cho Cho Htun, a computer teacher from No (6) Basic Education High School Botahtaung says that computers in the education field sometimes get a mixed wrap.

"I think using a computer is good if you use it for education but some people consider them a waste of time. Others just think they are a form of entertainment,"

Daw Cho Cho Htun said.

She said that kids who use computers at school develop better visual skills and cognitive awareness.

Computers are an important part of a child's life and education. Thandar Myo Win, a student from International Language and Business Centre (ILBC) says that computer lessons at her school mainly focus on Microsoft office; Word, Publisher, Access and Adobe Photoshop CS3.

"At home I use the internet and play different games such as Scrabble and bookworms to improve my vocabulary, Typer Shark to improve my typing skills, and Ningpo Mahjong to improve my sight," she said.

At the No (6) Basic Education High School students begin

to use computers from the 5th grade. Slide-shows, PowerPoint presentations and learning software are all used in the classroom.

"We also have a 'Learn to Speak English' program installed to help the children with their English language," Daw Cho Cho Htun said.

She added: "Since our school is located in downtown almost all of the students are able to use computers. But kids whose families cannot afford to buy a computer, use them at the internet café."

"We sometimes connect the computers to a television screen to teach the children," Daw Cho Cho Htun said, adding that whilst computers are useful, traditional tools such as books and class activities still play a dominant role in the

Myanmar classroom.

Whilst computers remain a luxury in the classrooms of No (6) Basic Education High School, the library at the Yangon International School (YIS) there are plenty of computers for learning and library research and students also use their own personalised computers for homework.

"We have all the books catalogued on a software system called Destiny. This assists with research projects and special teacher resources," said Greg Von Sprecken, the director of YIS.

He added that at his school a special music course is given to the students which involves using technology for composition and other technical related projects.

Boarding schools: a moral education

By Ye Linn Htut

BOARDING schools in Myanmar provide parents with a solid education option for parents looking to give their children a well-balanced education.

U Tun Nwe, the principal of Pyinnyar Nan Daw boarding school in Thuwanna Township in Yangon, told *The Myanmar Times* that boarding schools were a good option for parents struggling to control the development of their children.

"Some students struggle at ordinary schools, especially in examinations. Boarding schools fill a void where parents are unable to give students the extra help that they need," U Tun Nwe said.

Yangon Region now has 17 registered boarding schools, all of which meet government requirements for learning set by Department of Basic Education (3).

Today's boarding schools are focusing on moral education as well as written studies in order to achieve better results for their students.

"If students behave immorally, they will not be outstanding. For instance some students flirt whilst studying, others are addicted to drugs and alcohol," U Tun Nwe said.

He added: "The old philosophy was to entrench spirit, discipline and wisdom, which was not perfect as people did not know what spirit meant. Now we are focusing on morals, discipline and wisdom."

Other schools too are focusing on giving their students a more moral approach. Pyinnyar-Yeik-Nyein boarding school in North Okkalapa Township, Yangon Region, uses Buddhism to instill moral virtues.

"Students have to pay homage to the Buddha twice a day. Our teachers are teaching them to be real Theravada Buddhists," Pyinnyar Yeik Nyein's principal, U Cho Aye told *The Myanmar Times* on January 10.

Pyinnyar Yeik Nyein was created in 1983 and has grown

from a small school with 150 students into a learning institution with 300 pupils.

The school has recently started teaching student martial arts in an attempt to improve not only mental strength but physical fitness.

"Students go to Thuwanna Stadium three times a week, because according to a statement from the United Nations, judo and karate help to improve the body and mind. The students can build confidence and hopefully make changes in their lifestyle," U Cho Aye said.

One student from a boarding school in Insein Township said that at first he was uncomfortable away from home but after a while grew to love freedom there.

"When I first got here I was not very happy. I felt homesick. But after a while I made lots of friends and we all compete together in exams and school activities," a student studying at the Youth Affairs training center, who requested not to be named said.

"I enjoy this place more than my house," he said.

But for one parent, sending her children to a boarding school means that they can't be supervised and seems like not the best educational option.

"I would not send my children to a boarding school. I've heard that some of the schools don't really care for the students," Daw Khin Khin, a 57-year-old mother from Sanchaung Township said.

"For the amount of money they cost, boarding schools give insufficient meals and kids can become unhealthy."

"Whilst boarding schools say they instill discipline and morals, sometimes a lack of parental guidance actually has the opposite effect," she said.

"Parents have no idea what their children get up to. Sometimes children pick up bad habits such as smoking and flirting with girls."

Boarding schools in Myanmar charge from K1.7 million to K3 million. — *Translated by Yamon Phu Thit*



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Pic: AFP

College students raise their fists and shout during a job hunting ceremony in Tokyo on February 8, 2011. Some 1,500 students, who will graduate from schools in March 2012, attended the annual ceremony to encourage themselves for job hunting.