

Learning will never die



Autumn 2022 Newsletter | Issue 45



On the same day that 11 pupils were killed by an airstrike on a school in Sagaing (left),

The kindness of Prospect Burma supporters helped over 200 more young people to connect and study in safe locations (right).

We will never forget those who die, by never giving up on those who live to gain skills and knowledge to build an alternative, peaceful future.



Hello from Peter Morris, Prospect Burma's Communications Manager

The recent airstrike which killed 11 pupils at a school in Sagaing should cause global outcry. Instead, it is just another scarce-reported atrocity to add to a long list of massacres and human rights abuses in Myanmar.

Attacks on education are not accidental. Education is an agent of influence and change, at times more so than guns. Guns can fight power. But education can replace power by giving people knowledge to innovate and improve.

In many countries this is seen as a good thing. So, for over three decades, Prospect Burma has helped young people from Myanmar to access higher education abroad.

Our graduates make a huge difference. Some work for aid or development NGOs which operate in Myanmar. Others are back in their home communities. Many have founded Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in remote communities beyond the reach of foreign NGOs.

Sadly, there are those who still see this mode of positive change-making as a threat. As a result, young people are facing increasing barriers to accessing higher education. The education system is rigged to deny ethnic groups the learning and support they have a right to receive. Students are murdered. Schools are bombed.

Without a pipeline of school leavers with basic education

and skills, we cannot continue to help young people get into foreign universities to become the doctors, engineers and other professionals that Myanmar's people sorely need.

So we have taken decisive action. The rest of this newsletter will come thick and fast. It will detail six projects we are now delivering to enable young people to complete high school and study at post-high school level (the equivalent of sixth form in the UK, or Grade 11-12 in the US).

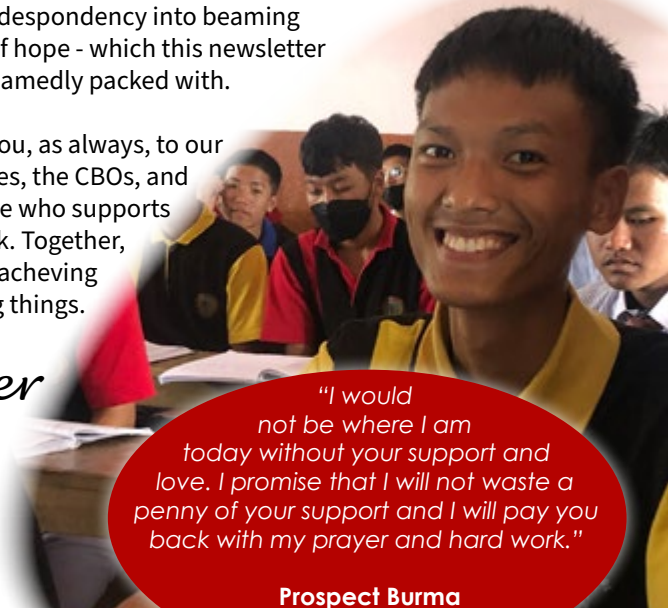
From next year onwards, these young people will be in a position to apply to colleges or traineeships, and to escape their oppressors' attempts to render them powerless.

Wonderfully, our graduates from past years are playing a huge part in delivering this work on the ground. They continually pay forward the support you have given them.

These graduates' CBOs are caring for young people dealing with trauma, grief and abuse. They are turning despondency into beaming smiles of hope - which this newsletter is unashamedly packed with.

Thank you, as always, to our graduates, the CBOs, and everyone who supports our work. Together, you are achieving amazing things.

Peter



"I would not be where I am today without your support and love. I promise that I will not waste a penny of your support and I will pay you back with my prayer and hard work."

**Prospect Burma
high school student**

9 reasons for young people being unable to apply to universities

- More than 500 schools have been attacked in the current conflict, including arson attacks and airstrikes. Many have also been taken over by the military.
- State schools are estimated to be around 80% empty (higher in ethnic areas). Students and teachers are driven away by the threat of violence or are boycotting.
- Schools were closed entirely for almost two years due to COVID-19 and the post-coup crisis.
- There is no Grade 11 or 12, so many young people are left unable to apply to international universities which require a minimum Grade 12 education.
- Many students have had to abandon their studies midway through. They cannot retrieve accreditations from their school or college due to the risk of arrest.
- No students even took a Grade 10 matriculation exam in 2021 due to COVID-19 and the coup. In 2022, around 25% of students sat an exam compared to pre-coup.
- Even where state education is continuing, it is conducted in Burmese - which a third of the population does not speak either as a first language, or at all! Pre-coup figures show only a fifth of students nationwide actually ended up passing a Grade 10 exam.
- State teaching is based on memorisation, with students taught not to question - leaving them unprepared to step up to higher education.
- Following the 1988 coup, restricting education was used for many years as a tool to prevent young people gaining knowledge to effect change. All indications are that this tactic is being used again post-2021.



Kachin State
15 Students
 from towns and refugee
 camps studying English
 Language



Mizoram
20 Students
 from Chin State studying Grade
 11-12 across the Indian
 border



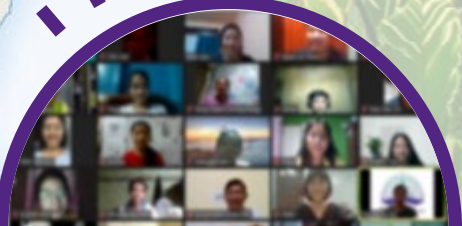
Thai Border
(Coming soon)
 Students from refugee camps
 and border towns
 studying GED



Rakhine State
76 Students
 studying English Language,
 critical thinking and
 digital skills



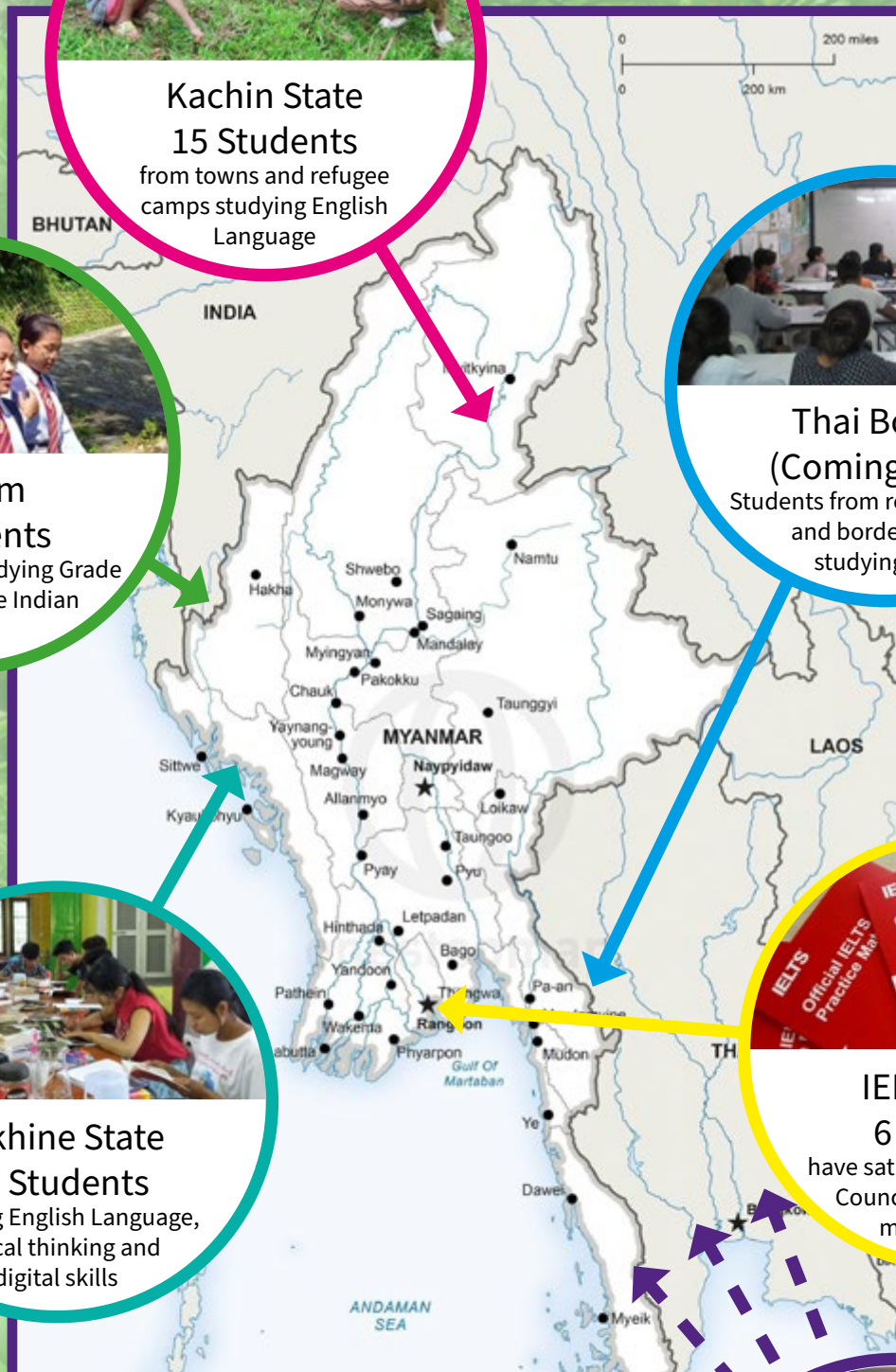
IELTS Exams
6 Students
 have sat exams at the British
 Council in Yangon, with
 more expected



Prospect Connect
120 Online Students
 English Language taught
 remotely across
 14 provinces

Prospect Burma Post-High School Learning Projects

Prospect Burma supports Community Based Organisations to deliver Grade 11-12 education to over 200 young people in Myanmar, and across the Indian and Thai borders.



A Day In The Life

How our supporters' funding is helping young Chin people study across the Indian border

The thick jungle air mixes with diesel fumes and steaming bowls of dahl in a hill town in Mizoram, India. Hot summer sun turns to cold nights as autumn arrives.

The fact that 20 students from Myanmar are here at all, is due to Prospect Burma supporters. The students have been brought here, from areas of danger or poverty, by our wonderful local partner organisation who ensures their needs are looked after every day.

The students' day begins at the hostel we rent, with male and female dormitories. To attend school in India, we buy them uniform - especially shoes, because the walk down to school is very steep.

Few of the students would talk with other teenagers when they arrived. But, after several months, they meet local Indian friends on the way to school. They have all picked up the local Mara language and now chat away with classmates who grew up in the town.

Registration in the schoolyard is the start of a daily routine the Myanmar students had not experienced before. They split into classes but, unlike in Myanmar schools, they do not sit silently while the teacher talks. They are encouraged to ask questions, and work with the teacher or in groups to solve problems.

So, in art class, the teacher leads the class in English. But as the lesson progresses, this becomes a discussion between all the students in a mixture of English and Mara, with the teacher and students all helping each other to express their thoughts and find the words they need.

"I used to be a person who stays alone and not make many friends. After coming to India, I started to have a lot of friends who are really kind and good to me. I have improved so much in presentation and communication skills compared to my life back in the village."

Student

Once morning class is over, students head back out into the recreation area. There is organised volleyball in the yard, while the rest of the students have a chance to chat and, generally, be teenagers. For some, this is the first time in their lives they have had access to drinking water and sanitation on a daily basis.

The fact that students have time to play or relax is in no small way due to the guiding hand of our partner organisation, who gently install time management and discipline into the students' daily routine. They encourage set times to get up, cook, clean, study, worship, exercise and make the best use of every day.

After lunch, it is time for science, and the support of Prospect



Burma and our partner is again in evidence. Firstly, the students have the text books and equipment they need. Secondly, we have helped them pre-prepare to keep up with their Indian classmates. We provide extra lessons in technical subjects such as computing or chemistry which they had never encountered before.

The students are thriving. All of the first intake passed their Grade 11 exams to progress to Grade 12, with over half receiving a distinction. One of our students got top marks in the year for science, and three more were the top three in art.

I have seen the Myanmar students are doing well in their studies. I am always ready to give admission to Myanmar students and have consideration for them, even though the due date of admission is over. I am so saddened to hear about what is going on in Myanmar.

School Principal

After school, it is a demanding uphill walk for the students back to the hostel. They need good nutrition to fuel them. The hostel provides rice, potato and dahl curry and the hostel owners have worked with us to get more garden vegetables on the menu too.

Study continues into the evening. This includes sessions to improve students' understanding of English and Mara. Our partner measured that the group's understanding of English words had doubled in just the first three months of the project. (The next-to-last image on the right looks like silent study, but the room is alive with chatter!)

Through our partner, we also look after the students' non-academic needs. We monitor their physical health, deal with minor sicknesses, and maintain their vitamin intake.

We also monitor their mental health. Several are dealing with grief or trauma alongside the culture shock and isolation of moving to another country. Most have never considered their future before - what they would like to do, what they enjoy, or where or who they want to be? So we provide ongoing emotional support, career counselling and help to plan and achieve goals.

Several are interested in higher education in order to become doctors or community leaders but don't know where to start. Others are more interested in returning to their home village when they finish school, because their Grade 12 skills will already benefit their community. We signpost the opportunities available to them, including our own higher education scholarship support.

The day ends with worship and a meal which brings the group closer together. The students clear up and prepare for bed. Our support even provides toothpaste and soap. Our partner provides on-hand guidance to stay hygienic, get to bed at a certain time, and make the best use of tomorrow. These young people have a future.

"If my son was not selected to go to India, he could have joined the war and might have lost his life in battle. I believe it saved my son's life. Thanks to the organisation and all members who have helped my son. I cannot think you enough for the love, kindness and generosity you have shown to my son."

Parent of student





Rakhine State

Our Rakhine project has thrived despite a range of challenges. Originally, in 2020, it was set up as a physical classroom. Our partner had to negotiate armed battles along the road from Yangon in order to bring in IT equipment. Then, as soon as it opened, Rakhine was hit by the COVID-19 Delta Variant wave from India. And then, of course, the coup happened.

Our partner led the way in moving its courses online. Its core offers are Basic English Language and Social Science - the latter including concepts of inclusivity and social structures that are not taught in Myanmar schools. Alongside, it provides IT tuition, critical thinking skills development, and an English Conversation Club. It also delivers an information hub with a huge range of signposting guidance to help students progress in their careers or studies.

In 2020-21 alone, 76 students undertook courses and 1,400 more people visited the project's social media to glean information. Its work has now expanded into IDP camps and it is providing mobile phones and batteries to Rohingya students.

Kachin State

Prospect Burma currently supports 15 young people to study English Language in a town in Kachin State. We are working closely with an education partner who has operated in the State since 2001.

This is a one-year intensive course which is offered on a hybrid basis, with students travelling to attend in person if they are safe to do so, or otherwise studying online. We fund tuition for all 15 students, as well as some IT equipment for remote students and accommodation, food and travel for those who can attend in person.

The progressive Basic English Language curriculum covers fields such as social responsibility, environmental awareness and development of self-confidence.

Extracurricular activities include a time and stress management workshop.



Our partner also gets young people involved in a range of activities to develop responsibility and working together including preparing food, camp maintenance, gardening, feeding livestock and leading worship.

IELTS Exams

We directly support students to travel to Yangon and sit an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam at the British Council. This qualification greatly improves their academic and career marketability. Moving around the country carries great risk at the moment so the number of candidates is very low. We hope to increase this number as or when the risk reduces.



Prospect Connect

This project started as Prospect Burma's flagship response to the COVID-19 crisis, but has since proved invaluable in providing safe, online learning amid the dangers of Myanmar's political violence.

The course focusses on Intermediate English Language and critical thinking, and is tailored for use on a mobile phone. It provides a next step for young people with basic English - including students from our Kachin and Rakhine States programmes - to progress towards an IELTS qualification which is recognised internationally.

Extracurricular activities include sessions on presenting, sharing ideas and knowledge about faith and ethnicity, and developing confidence and social awareness. Prospect Burma's staff work every Friday to set up workshop sessions.

100 per cent of students have reported improvements in their English and critical thinking skills. Two progressed to receive scholarships from Prospect Burma to study at a foreign university. A second batch of 60 students enrolled in 2022 who, together, represent every state or region nationwide.



Thai Border

We will shortly be starting a project to serve marginalised young people along the Thai border. This is likely to include students in refugee camps such as Mae La (left).

Our partner organisation works with other Community Based Organisations to offer courses in the camps and remote areas.

We are working with them to enable young people to gain a General Educational Diploma (GED). This is a series of tests which indicate whether a student has attained a level of education equivalent to graduating from high school.

This qualification is recognised internationally by many universities and employers.

We are working on building courses which include critical thinking, research, IT, leadership, emotional learning and English Language.

Capacity Building

We partner with a wide range of Community Based Organisations who work in different ways. We help them share good practice. We also help them to increase their capacity to deliver good results. This can include workshops and guidance on project management, applying for funding, accountancy, reporting and help to improve organisational management including human resources and safe, efficient working practices.



Burma Watch - A Land in Conflict

Myanmar today is a land in deepening crisis and emergency. Following the coup by the military State Administrative Council (SAC) in February last year, repression and conflict have spread to every part of the country as the national armed forces – known as the Tatmadaw – seek to use force to quell any sign of opposition or dissent. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the leaders of the National League for Democracy, which won the 2020 general election, remain in prison; over 2,300 civilians have been killed by the security forces and over 12,000 political prisoners are held in jail; and the numbers of refugees and internally-displaced persons has passed the two million mark.

Resistance, though, is by no means at an end. Opposition against the military regime is continuing to mount, whether through the Civil Disobedience Movement in urban areas or armed struggle by ethnic and pro-democracy activists in the countryside. Less than half the country is under SAC control; fighting is occurring daily in the Chin, Karen, Kayah, Rakhine and Shan States as well as Magway, Sagaing and Tanintharyi Regions; and the SAC has formed paramilitary forces, known as Pyu Saw Hti, to attack People's Defence Forces which are seeking to protect local communities from human rights violations and regime abuse.

In the meantime, the umbrella National Unity Government, consisting of NLD MPs-elect and representatives of ethnic parties and civil society groups, is increasingly acting as a rival administration within the

country, supporting health and education programmes and building understanding with other movements against military rule. Myanmar is essentially in a state of civil war.

Despite its popularity, though, the NUG has difficulty in finding broader international support. Aid is not being provided on anything like the scale that is needed. Russia is the SAC's closest ally; China is sitting on the fence hoping for trends to move towards its advantage; and ASEAN, the UN and other international bodies have failed to develop a cohesive response. The International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice continue to carry out investigations. But the pace of action is glacially slow. Against this backdrop, Snr-Gen. Min Aung Hlaing and the SAC generals maintain repression as their primary tool, focusing on holding a stage-managed election next year in a bid to "legitimise" their coup.

Perhaps no incident dramatized the horrors of the present situation more graphically than the SAC airstrike on a school in Tabayin Township on 16 September in which 11 students were killed. Such terror tactics are routinely employed by the security forces in the SAC's bid to cover the civilian population and enforce its rule.

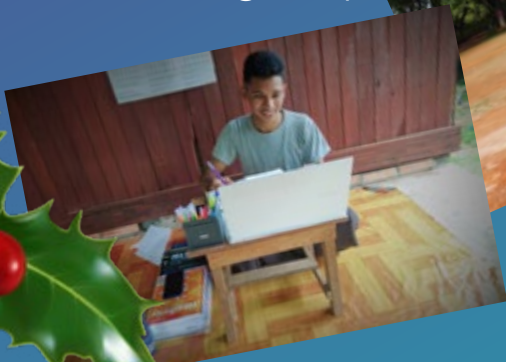
Sadly, as the seasons change, there is little indication that this tragedy will end at any time soon. More than ever, support for education and the provision of hope and opportunity for young people are vital to build a better future. Education is a fundamental human right and remains the key to change.

Coming this Christmas

£10 to £25 gift cards of a donation for essential education equipment

A range of Christmas cards

Look for our online shop:
prospectburma.org/shop



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