

THAILAND

1 – 15 March 2019

Media Monitoring report # 202

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

UPC Meets Ten EAOs in Thailand

Eleven Myanmar, 10 March 2019

A Union Peace Commission delegation led by retired Lt-Gen Khin Zaw Oo and representatives from ten Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) which have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), held an informal talk in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on March 9, said Colonel Sai Ngin, Secretary-2 of the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS).



"It is said that we could seek ways of how to resume the stalled peace process at the talk. But we need to take a few time. Both sides have similar attitudes towards the peace. The situation is said to be good," he added.

He declined to release details about the talk. They are discussing the ways agreeable to both sides.

On March 8, the UPC led by retired Lt-Gen Khin Zaw Oo held an informal meeting with the Karen National Union (KNU). Today (March 10), the delegation will meet with the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP).

<https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/upc-meets-ten-eaos-in-thailand>

Armed Ethnic Groups to Reshuffle Negotiating Team

Myanmar Times, 6 March 2019

Two top members of the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) will be replaced to strengthen it, the panel's leader said on Tuesday.

Saw Mutu Sae Poe, leader of the PPST – which comprises the armed ethnic groups that signed a truce with the government – said the team is meeting to discuss the leadership changes.

Ten armed ethnic groups have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which the government says is a precondition for participating in peace negotiations.

"The Karen National Union (KNU) and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) are reviewing the team's members based on differences in opinion over its future direction," said Saw Mutu Sae Poe, who also chairs the KNU. "Our two groups will discuss the matter to change the composition of the PPST. We will make appropriate changes." RCSS leader Yawd Serk is vice chair of the team.

The PPST was established in 2017 when there were only eight NCA signatories. It is trying to find common ground among the 10 NCA signatories on the three topics they want reviewed at the ongoing peace talks.

<https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/armed-ethnic-groups-reshuffle-negotiating-team.html>

LAND AND PROPERTY

Over 1,400 Acres of Confiscated Lands Returned to 355 Farmers in Ayeyawady Region

Eleven Myanmar, 3 March 2019

Vice-President Henry Van Thio attended a ceremony to mark the Peasants' Day in Taungsu village in Ywathit village-tract in Einme Township in Ayeyawady Region, on March 2.

The Vice-President said: "The government is working to promote the socio-economic status of the rural people and to help develop the State economy through the improvement of sustainable agricultural production system and increased production of agriculture and livestock products which can compete with those in the international market. In accord with the objective described in the law to protect the rights of farmers and promote their interests in order to implement the interest of rural farmers who account for 70 per cent of the population in the agro-based country, the government is working to help farmers regain their own lands and to give protection to them to guarantee farmland rights."



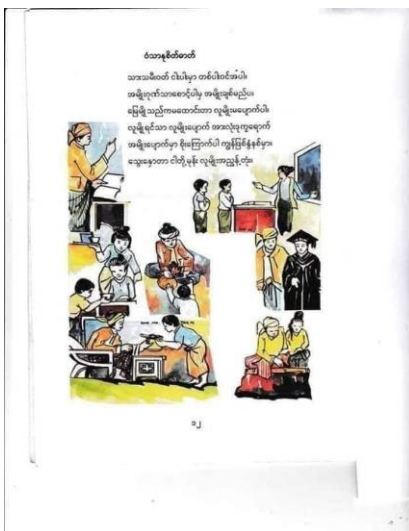
Yuzana Company returned 636 acres of confiscated lands to 103 farmers in Pantanaw Township, Infantry Battalion (93), 209 acres to 66 farmers in Myaungmya Township, Methanol factory, 157 acres to 157 farmers in Kyangin Township and Infantry Battalion (36), 84 acres to 29 farmers in Yegyi Township.

<https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/over-1400-acres-of-confiscated-lands-returned-to-355-farmers-in-ayeyawady-region>

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Racially, Religiously Discriminative Lesson to be dropped from National Curriculum

The Irrawaddy, 13 March 2019



YANGON—The Ministry of Education has ordered the removal of a lesson from the civic education subject in the elementary curriculum of both government and private schools which has been the subject of complaints for its racism and religious discrimination.

In December, more than 100 civil society groups wrote an open letter to President U Win Myint to complain that a civics education lesson taught in elementary schools includes discriminatory phrases such as, "Mixed blood is a hateful wrongdoing, and the race will be extinct." Such phrases have been taught in schools since the early 2010s.

"Those lessons seem to attempt to indoctrinate the innocent minds of children with discriminatory practices," it said.

The letter was also copied to the State Counselor's Office, the Ministry of Education and parliamentary speakers.

The directive issued by the Ministry of Education to stop teaching the lesson and remove it from the curriculum was recently circulated on social media.

Deputy Education Minister U Win Maw Tun confirmed the decision to The Irrawaddy on Tuesday. He said they decided to remove it as it goes against with the ministry's no-discrimination policy.

"We really thank the Ministry of Education for the decision," said Daw Kathleen Thein, who chairs Inngyin May Hindu Women's Network, which also signed the letter.

The ministry's decision came following a meeting with representatives from the civil societies last month.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/racially-religiously-discriminative-lesson-dropped-national-curriculum.html>

Myaungmya Bridge Construction Completed Over 90%

Eleven Myanmar, 4 March 2019

The construction of new Myaungmya Bridge in Ayeyawady Region has completed by over 90 percent on March 3, and officials will test how much the bridge can withstand by allowing traffic on March 20.

The new bridge is located 46 feet away from the old suspension bridge. The new bridge construction started on May 1, 2017 just before the old one collapsed. Despite of planned two-year construction, authorities took only one year to build the new bridge of steel truss type as the old one collapsed on April 1 in the same year and the local populace demanded sooner opening.



"I am here to check the bridge. About 90 percent has been completed. Lamp posts are being set up on the approach roads. We will complete it in the second week of this month. The special bridge construction team will test the bridge capacity to withstand on March 20 by allowing runs of trucks. We will make records. We will plan to open the bridge as soon as it finishes," Win Htay, Region Minister for Electricity, Energy, Industry and Transport.

Ayeyawady Region is upgrading Labutta, Wakhema, Shwelaung and Kyungon suspension bridges into reinforced concrete ones as their capacity to withstand is declining.

Patheingyi river-crossing bridge project has also kick-started.

<https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/myaungmya-bridge-construction-completed-over-90>

Rural Areas to Receive Electricity Powered by Renewable Sources: Minister

Myanmar Times, 3 March 2019

Rural areas far from the national grid will get electricity through renewable energy sources, says Minister of Electricity and Energy U Win Khine.



He said the government will provide electricity to these areas through renewable energy as lower population density and electricity usage may not make it economical to expand the national grid.

The government aims to distribute electricity to 50pc of the country by end-2019, and to cover the entire country by 2030.

Myanmar's current power-generation capacity stands at 3,500MW with electricity usage improving 15pc yearly. The MOEE plans to generate an additional 394MW in 2018-19, 450MW in 2019-20, and 1,712MW in 2020-21.

According to earlier reports, the government aims to generate 8pc of electricity through renewable energy sources by 2021 and 12pc by 2025 through solar and wind energy.

According to the MOEE, wind energy plants can potentially be developed in Chin State, Rakhine State, Yangon Division, Shan State, Kayah State, Tanintharyi Division, Mon State and Kayah State.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/rural-areas-receive-electricity-powered-renewable-sources-minister.html>

Public Health Professionals Launch Five-Year Strategic Plan

Myanmar Times, 4 March 2019

The Myanmar Health Assistant Association on Sunday launched a five-year plan to improve the public health sector and the general health of Myanmar people, the association's president said.

"This is the first strategic plan of the association. We tried to compile invaluable input and suggestions from experts and relevant stakeholders," U Myo Thwin, association president, said at the launch of its Strategic Plan (2019-2023) in Yangon on Sunday.

Under the plan, the 478-strong staff of the association will implement 12 public health projects in 76 townships in the states and regions of Kachin, Kayin, Shan, Rakhine, Chin, Sagaing, Mandalay, Magwe and Yangon.

The projects include disease control, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health, as well as nutrition.

In 2019, the association will have sub-offices in 307 townships across the country, with an estimated 5365 members.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/public-health-professionals-launch-five-year-strategic-plan.html>



Farmers to Receive K600 Billion in Funds

Myanmar Times, 3 March 2019

The Myanmar Cooperatives Society will extend funds totaling K600 billion as loans to farmers for the winter and summer harvest this year.



The loans are given out twice a year to farmers who are members of the society. "The funds are loaned to us by the Chinese. We then extend these funds to our members at 1.5 percent per month," said U Myo Aung, director of Myanmar Cooperatives Society.

He said the interest rate this year is higher than last year's rate of 1.15pc per month. "We've increased the interest rates because the exchange rate has become dearer. But the current rates are still low, so most of the borrowers should not have a problem repaying the loan," U Myo Aung said.

The loans are expected to cover agriculture-related equipment and technology or better seeds to improve crop quality.

Farmers must repay the loans by the end of June, after which funds will be extended to a new batch of farmers.

There are 4600 cooperative groups across the 307 townships in Myanmar. Each group comprises at least five people.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/farmers-receive-k600-billion-funds.html-0>

Govt to Open Elderly Care Training Course

Myanmar Times, 5 March 2019

The government will hold an elderly care training course this month to promote the welfare of senior citizens and open up more overseas job opportunities, said Myanmar Health and Sports Minister U Myint Htwe.

The six-month course will be start on Thursday with the help of non-governmental organisations Poster Guigo Service Co. and the Japanese Elderly Care Training School.

There is high demand for elderly caregivers all over the world. The course can accept only 97 people out of the more than 1000 who applied for the training.

U Than Aung Soe, MP for Minhla township in Bago Region, said that the young people trained in elderly care could easily find jobs abroad.

He added that nurses and nursing assistants are also in high demand in Myanmar and some foreign countries.

To close the gap, the government will soon open the University of Nursing in Shwebo Township in Sagaing Region, Myaungmya Township in Ayeyarwady Region and Hakha Township in Chin State.

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population's National Skills and Standards Authority manages private nurse's aide training, elderly care training and certification, U Myint Htwe said.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/govt-open-elderly-care-training-course.html>

Ayeyawady Catfish Farming Project to Earn \$150 m Yearly

Eleven Myanmar, 5 March 2019

A catfish farming project located on 900 acres of land in Pantanaw Township, Ayeyawady Region, will be implanted with a starting capital of K200 billion and the project is expected to earn US\$150 million a year, said Htay Myint, president of Myanmar Fisheries Federation.

"We have started a trail-run on 900-acre land. We have planned to make an initial investment of K200 billion. We will breed 150,000 fingerlings to earn US\$150 million a year in export. We have so far collected about 60 percent of the fingerlings. We will try to compete with the international community," he said.

The project is being implemented by global Earth Public Co Ltd established by Myanmar Fisheries Federation. Now, fish farms and buildings are being set up.

"We have to take eight more months to complete all our facilities such as factories and fish farms. They will be completed this year I think. But we could make our products next year. We will also arrange market promotion," said Toe Nanda Tin, vice president of the federation.

The project includes a hatchery, fish farms, feed factory, cold storage factory and staffing housing. Global Earth Public Co Ltd will invite shareholders when the project comes into shape.

<https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/ayeyawady-catfish-farming-project-to-earn-150-m-yearly>

Organisation Seeks 4000 Teaching Jobs for Disabled

Myanmar Times, 6 March 2019

The Myanmar Federation of People with Disabilities has asked the government to help find 4000 teaching jobs for people with disabilities.

At a workshop on promoting employment for persons with disabilities on Wednesday, U Thein Lwin said, "We have been advocating jobs for the disabled in the private sector, so we should do the same in the public sector. People with disabilities face many challenges in life, but many are more than able to teach, so we ask the government's help to look into setting aside 4000 teaching positions for the disabled," he said, adding that accessibility issues such as lack of wheelchair ramps are still common in the private sector.

Asked to comment, U Myo Aung, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population,

said: “We are working to match the disabled with the right types of work.”

Under the Disability Rights Law updated in 2017, all companies that employ people with disabilities receive tax incentives, while those that do not employ people with disabilities are required to contribute to a fund to assist the disabled.

Myanmar signed the United Nations Convention on People with Disabilities in 2011, and unveiled the 10-year National Strategy for the Development of People with Disabilities in 2016.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/organisation-seeks-4000-teaching-jobs-disabled.html>

Domestic Airlines Need Mergers, Partnerships to Sustain

Myanmar Times, 7 March 2019

There is a need for domestic airlines to merge or form partnerships with foreign airlines in order to sustain themselves in the longer-term.

Stakeholders believe that the way forward for domestic airlines, which continue to be loss-making due to lower number of passengers and higher costs, would be to either merge their operations or form partnerships with foreign airlines.

Ticket prices remain high despite the larger number of domestic airlines and the more intense competition, putting off air travelers. Tour operators noted that domestic air tickets were far higher when compared to other countries, making it an obstacle for tourism.

Minister for Hotels and Tourism U Ohn Maung told the media recently that domestic airlines must be able to operate in a level playing field with foreign airlines.

He had previously suggested that domestic airlines should look for partnerships among themselves if they wanted to sustain their business and cut costs.

Despite foreign airlines being able to enter joint ventures with domestic airlines to operate local routes, the lack of business has not made it commercially viable.

Directorate of Hotel and Tourism deputy director general Daw Khin Than Win said although Myanmar and Cambodia signed a MoU for a direct flight between Bagan and Angkor, the route has not started operating as there were few passengers and unprofitable.

As for foreign airlines wanting to partner with domestic airlines, there have already been several unsuccessful attempts, notably by All Nippon Airways and Air Asia. The law allows for the foreign partner to hold a 49pc stake.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/domestic-airlines-need-mergers-partnerships-sustain.html>



More Investments Needed for Expansion in Food-Processing Industry

Myanmar Times, 11 March 2019

The Myanmar processed food industry needs more investment support in order to develop further, U Aye Win, chair of the Myanmar Food Processors and Exporters Association, told *The Myanmar Times*.

Currently, Myanmar processes basic raw commodities such as rice, beans, maize and other agricultural products. Excess products are exported. However, the country also imports value-added processed foods such as canned or dairy products. In that light, Myanmar should increase its focus on manufacturing higher value food products, which will require funds from both local and foreign investors, U Aye Win said.

According to the Myanmar Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Survey 2017 by the Ministry of Planning and Finance, the majority of MSMEs in Myanmar are involved in the food processing sector.

Currently, state-owned Myanmar Economic Bank lends money to MSMEs in the import substitution business, while local private banks work with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JETRO) to disburse loans to businesses in the industry.

“Interest in the Myanmar food industry among Japanese investors is rising due to the size of the population. Myanmar currently has a population of over 52 million,” said U Khun Thura, deputy managing director of JETRO in Yangon.

Stricter regulations to curb illegal imports and standards ensuring a minimum level of quality must also be enforced, U Zarmi Maung Maung said. “The government should take action on these two fronts to enable a fair and viable paying field for legal businesses,” he said.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/more-investments-needed-expansion-food-processing-industry.html>

LAW AND GOVERNANCE

National Environmental Policy to be Revealed Soon

Mizzima, 9 March 2019

The Union Government will release the National Environmental Policy, 2030 Strategy and Master Plan soon, said Vice President U Myint Swe, Patron of the National Level Environmental Conservation and Climate Change Central Committee, state media reported.



He was speaking at the 7th coordination meeting of the central committee at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation in Nay Pyi Taw yesterday.

The Vice President said that Myanmar needed a strategy to conserve the environment and to fight the impacts of climate change on the country’s coastal areas and arid zones which were relying on fisheries, agriculture and livestock breeding while the country was relying on its natural resources for the socio-economic development.

The National Environmental Policy would ensure sustainable development, prosperity and a community which could endure climate change and reduce carbon emission leading to prosperity of the current and next generations, he said.

<http://mizzima.com/article/national-environmental-policy-be-revealed-soon>

Than Shwe Confidant Launches New Political Party of Generals

Myanmar Times, 4 March 2019

A new political party comprised of senior military officers has been registered by a trusted confidant of former Myanmar strongman Senior General Than Shwe.

The Democratic Party of National Politics (DNP) is led by U Soe Maung, minister of the President’s Office in the U Thein Sein government, who held the rank of lieutenant general in the Tatmadaw (military). He was also judge advocate general in the Than Shwe government and a trusted confidant of Snr Gen Than Shwe.



He won a seat in parliament for Yesagyo Township, Magwe Region, in the 2010 elections but lost the seat to the National League for Democracy candidate in the 2015 elections.

The DNP leadership includes former chair of the Union Civil Services Board, U Kyaw Thu, who is a son of former president U Maung Maung, and former Union Auditor-General U Lun Maung, who operated a food shop in Mon State prior to his political comeback.

The party will be based in Nay Pyi Taw. The name of the new party, its flag and logo were announced in the state-owned newspaper on Saturday. Anyone who wants to has seven days to register their objections.

<https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/shwe-confidant-launches-new-political-party-generals.html>

Taninthayi Chief Minister, Three Company Officials Face Corruption Charges

The Global New Light of Myanmar, 11 March 2019

The Anti-Corruption Commission formed an investigation team to look into a corruption complaint against the Chief Minister of Taninthayi Region, Dr. Lae Lae Maw. The team conducted its investigation in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon, and Dawei from 4 to 6 February.



According to the investigation team's report, the Taninthayi Region Government assigned F-22 Sunny Construction Co. Ltd the job of erecting the Thingyan central pavilion in April, 2016 and the task of clearing bushes at the Dawei University compound in November, 2016, along with the Dawei Airport compound, charging what was described as an unreasonable fee.

The Regional Government invited tenders on 15 December, 2016 for clearing bushes in the Dawei Airport compound and F-22 Sunny Construction Co. was awarded the K400 million contract through misuse of the Chief Minister's authority. The act amounted to taking a bribe

in favor of an organization, and depleted the Union's budget, as the government paid a higher amount than the prevailing market price, the report stated.

According to the report, without observing the financial rules and directives of the Union Government, Chief Minister Dr. Lae Lae Maw allowed the Road Management Department of the region to draw a lump sum of K1.9 billion, which was used by U Tun Min, husband of the director of the department, to buy two plots of land, N1068 and 1070, under the name 'U Myint Ho'. U Tun Min also ordered construction of a brick wall, at a cost of K14 million, and it was found that the fee was paid only after the investigation was opened, and the failure to pay the actual cost amounted to bribery, the report stated.

According to the investigation, the Chief Minister sold a two-storey house and compound owned by her family on Myeik-Dawei Road, Myoma Ward, Thayetchanung Township, to Global Grand Services (GGS) for K200 million, which was much higher than the actual price of K32 million. She gave permission to GGS to build a fish auction market in Thayetchaung, distribute power in Dawei District, and build a gymnasium in Dawei, a town hall in Palaw, four six-unit four-storey houses in Dawei and Myeik, and a Taninthayi Region guesthouse and staff quarters in Nay Pyi Taw, the report stated. U Thura Ohn, one of the buyers of the Chief Minister's house, was the general manager of the GGS and also had business relations with it, the report stated. U Thura Ohn, along with two other officials from the company — U Thein Htwe and U Aung Myat — bought the property at a price that was six times higher than the market price. According to the report, a power distribution agreement in Dawei District, Taninthayi Region, was reached on 6 December, 2016. The agreement was signed by the secretary of the regional government on its behalf, and U Thein Htwe on behalf of GGS, the report stated.

Failure to implement the project, in accordance with the conditions of the agreement, amounted to violating rules and regulations, and GGS has failed to pay K8,000 million for its gas supply since 1 July, 2017, due to

which the Union suffered losses, as the Ministry of Electricity and Energy had to bear the cost, the report added.

It was found that the Chief Minister, and U Thein Htwe, along with U Aung Myat of GGC Company, were involved in the corruption case, the report added.

According to the findings of the team, the Myoma Police Station in Dawei is preparing to file a lawsuit against Chief Minister Daw Lae Lae Maw under Section 55 of the Anti-Corruption Law, and Managing Director U Thein Htwe, Director U Aung Myat, and U Thura Ohn under Sections 55/63 of the Anti-Corruption Law.

<http://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/taninthayi-chief-minister-three-company-officials-face-corruption-charges/>

OTHERS

Thai Refugee Camp Fire Leaves Over 400 People Homeless

Myanmar Times, 6 March 2019

At least 400 people were left homeless by a fire that gutted dozens of houses at Nu Po refugee camp on the Myanmar-Thai border, an officer of a local Myanmar aid agency said on Tuesday.

Saw Bway Sae, secretary of the Karen Refugee Committee, said 88 houses were destroyed in the fire on Monday afternoon.

"Many houses were gutted, as the wind fuelled the fire. Some houses had to be demolished before the fire could be put out," he said. "But there were no injuries or deaths in the accident. We still don't know what caused it, as Thai investigators are still gathering information."

Thai police are estimating the damage caused by the fire, and the committee is providing food and shelter to refugees who lost their homes.

Nu Po is a large refugee camp in Umphang district of Tak province in western Thailand, which is located opposite Kayin State.

The camp was established in 1997, merging two refugee camps set up in the area five years earlier. It has 15,000 Myanmar refugees, more than 80 percent of whom are ethnic Karen, according to the Myanmar Border Consortium.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/thai-refugee-camp-fire-leaves-over-400-people-homeless.html>

Temporary Thai Centre to Renew Myanmar Workers' Passports

Myanmar Times, 7 March 2019

Thailand's cabinet agreed on Tuesday to establish a Temporary Myanmar Labour Data Collection Centre in Samut Prakan for the convenience of migrant workers seeking to renew their passports in order to continue working in Thailand.

The idea for the centre, which will renew the passports of two categories of Myanmar workers, was proposed by the Labour Ministry.

So-called "Function A Labourers" have previously been employed in Thailand and hold a passport, a temporary passport (TP) or a certificate of identity (CI).

Function B Labourers have already been granted a work permit and a passport in Thailand under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries. They will be eligible to use the centre if they wish to keep working in the country after their four-year permit expires.

Nathporn Chatusripitak, an adviser to the PM's Office, said the centre also aims to make life easier for Thai employers.

Nathporn said the Cabinet has approved in principle the Labour Ministry's suggested smart visa for migrant workers.

<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/temporary-thai-centre-renew-myanmar-workers-passports.html>

Locals in Thailand and Myanmar Pray for Salween River to always Run Free

Eleven Myanmar, 15 March 2019

The lives of people living along the Salween River still face the risk of being adversely impacted by developments in the river basin, environment campaigners said on the International Day of Action for Rivers yesterday.

Local communities along the Salween River in both Thailand and Myanmar marked the 22nd International Day of Action for Rivers, as a symbol of their efforts to protect their traditional way of life, rich natural resources and the river's healthy ecosystem from hydropower dam development and other harmful projects.

Ban Sobmoei in Mae Hong Son's Sop Moei district is one of the many Salween riverside communities that also marks World Anti-Dam Day on March 14 every year.

This year the villagers invited the international environmental group, International Rivers, to participate in a religious rite to pray for a bountiful river and the ability to fight against efforts by investors and the authorities to develop mega-projects in the Salween River Basin.



Salween is one of the only rivers in the world that still runs free from its source in the Tibetan Plateau down to the Andaman Sea.

The authorities are also planning six more hydropower dam projects in the mainstream of Salween River and Egat is funding two – the Dagwin and Wei Gyi dams.

<https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/locals-in-thailand-and-myanmar-pray-for-salween-river-to-always-run-free-asianewsnetwork>

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Links: Thailand-Myanmar Cross Border Web Portal: www.commonservice.info



Regional funding and funding for Thailand was also received through private donations from Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States of America.