

Grassroots projects win backing

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MEDICAL equipment for a leprosy hospital, a school building for rural children and electricity supplies to 14 villages are the latest projects to be funded through the Japanese Grassroots Assistance Scheme.

The four separate grants were announced over the last two weeks.

"From April to this moment we have approved a

number of projects," said Mr Masamichi Hashimoto, second secretary of the Japanese Embassy.

"Probably, this year we will spend about the same amount we did last year. I hope that it will be more.

"Our government is looking to increase support for NGO activities. There is a 20 per cent increased budget in Tokyo so I expect that - we hope that - we will see some of this increase."

The Christian Leprosy and Reconstructive Surgery Hospital in Mawlamyaing is to receive surgical and x-ray equipment to improve the

standard of treatment it provides. The equipment is expected to be installed over the next three to four months.

"We are to receive a Phillips x-ray machine, that is very expensive," said Dr Saw Wah Htoo, medical superintendent of the hospital.

"Also an operating table, suction machine, surgical instruments and patient

transfer boards and laboratory microscope and many other things.

"The most important thing for us is the generator.

"Getting aid is always welcome from any institution."

In Ha Kha township in

Chin State, the Japanese aid money will build a two-storey nursery school to house 80 children whose existing base is too small to meet their educational needs.

In Sagaing Division, 13 villages which are not on the national power grid will be given solar-powered batteries to provide lighting for 17,000 people.

And in Kayin State, a hydro-electricity plant will be built.

"We can't provide energy by the power line, it can be expensive," said Mr Hashimoto.

"This also gives them an alternative method for lighting than using wood - this is all better both for the environment and for them."

The Grant Assistance for Grassroots Scheme supports NGO projects in developing countries, mainly in health and education. In Myanmar, 47 projects received assistance in the 1999-2000 financial year.

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A laboratory microscope will improve treatment at a leprosy hospital