

# National Sanitation Week

By Sandar Linn

MYANMAR has become known as a leader in South-east Asia in promoting better hygiene practices, which has saved many lives, the acting country representative of the United Nations Children's Fund, Ms Elke Wisch, said last month.

Ms Wisch was speaking at a ceremony on February 26 marking the start of National Sanitation Week, which has been commemorated in Myanmar since 1998.

More than 100 officials from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and national and international non-government organisations attended the event.

Ms Wisch said she hoped that activities during the week would provide strong support towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals of reducing by half the percentage of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities by 2015.

She said that Myanmar was making great progress in providing clean water supplies and improving sanitation and hygiene throughout the country.

"Families in Myanmar today - in both urban and rural areas - are installing sanitation and water systems in their communities and schools because they understand it is the best protection against disease for them and for their children," she said.

"Sanitation and hygiene



Dr Than Htut (L), the deputy director of the Occupational Health Division, gives a demonstration to Dr Kyaw Myint, the Minister of Health, at a National Sanitation Week exhibition.

education is now incorporated into the curriculum in primary schools, and school water supply systems have been installed in many parts of the country," said Ms Wisch.

"There is no place better than schools to start promoting sanitary habits and improved hygiene practices, and it is encouraging to note the emphasis that is being given today to hygiene education, together with water and sanitation facilities in primary schools in

Myanmar," she said.

Ms Wisch said that UNICEF is preparing its next five-year program of assistance to Myanmar. Slated to start in 2006, the program will have two priorities - to extend water and sanitation services, and to improve water quality.

The Minister of Health, Dr Kyaw Myint, called for strong partnerships among international and national NGOs, the private sector, and the thousands of volunteers from villages, townships, states and divisions.

According to the ministry, 80 per cent of the country has access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities; the remaining 20 per cent comprises rural populations and the urban poor.

Dr Kyaw Myint said these two groups were at the greatest risk of diseases caused by

inadequate access to safe drinking water and poor sanitation.

He also said that a significant proportion of the population needs greater awareness about adequate hygiene such as washing hands before meals and the proper maintenance of latrines.

A project launched by the Health Planning Department in 2000 has a target of providing universal access to safe water and sanitation facilities by 2025.

Known as the 'four cleans' (clean toilets, clean water, clean hands and clean food), the project is managed by Dr Khin Maung Lwin - the deputy director of the Central Health Education Bureau, under the Ministry of Health - who said that coordination among government departments and NGOs was essential for it to achieve its goals.