

Spectacular Myanmar lake festival resumes after three years

INLE LAKE, Myanmar (AP) — One of the most colorful festivals in the Southeast Asian nation of Myanmar, involving scores of rowed boats and a spectacular gold-gilded barge, was celebrated this year after a three-year hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic and violent political instability.

The venue is Inle Lake in southern Shan state, about 260 miles northeast of Yangon. Inle, the country’s second largest freshwater lake and a popular tourist attraction year-round, is famous for its fishermen from the Intha ethnic minority who practice a unique style of rowing while standing with one leg wrapped around a single oar.

Their skills are on full display during the annual Phaung Daw Oo pagoda festival, which lasts almost three weeks. The fishermen row their boats to pull the Karaweik barge, an ornate vessel with a golden image of a mythical bird at its bow that carries four statues of Buddha to tour 21 villages around the lake so that people can pay homage to them.

The festivities also include leg-rowing boat races with each boat carrying between 40 and 100 rowers. Hundreds of local residents observed the activities from small craft on the lake, and more from onshore.

The festival is being celebrated despite armed conflict across much of Myanmar, as the army seeks to quash resistance to its takeover in February 2021 that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Thousands of people have died in the conflict and more than a million have been uprooted by army offensives.

Opponents of army rule urged people not to attend the festival because the military could use it as propaganda to claim that the country is back to normal under its control.

There were no incidents reported at the festival, where security was tight, but very few foreign tourists attended.



PAGODA FESTIVAL. A large boat carries Buddha images, left photo, during pagoda festival tours across Inle Lake in southern Shan state, Myanmar. In the right photo, local people sit in their boat watching the movement of Buddha images during the pagoda festival. Inle Lake, located about 260 miles northeast of Yangon, is the country’s second largest freshwater lake and a popular tourist attraction. (AP Photo/Thein Zaw)



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URSINE INVASION. A bear in a cage is seen on a truck in Misato town, Akita prefecture last month. Bears believed to be a parent and two cubs walked into a tatami mat factory in Misato town, where there’s been a growing number of reported bear attacks in or near residential areas. (Kyodo News via AP)

Three bears captured after sneaking into a tatami factory

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Three bears that snuck into a tatami mat factory in northern Japan and were holed up inside for nearly a day were captured and killed, according to town officials and media reports.

A patrolling official spotted the bears, believed to be a parent and two cubs, as they walked into the factory in Misato, a town in Akita prefecture, where there’s been a growing number of reported bear attacks in or near residential areas.

An owner of the factory said he saw the bears walking outside but never thought they would come inside.

Town officials and police officers rushed to the site, wearing helmets and carrying shields, and kept watch. Local hunters used firecrackers to try to scare the intruders out, without success. They later set up a pair of cages at the entrance of the factory and waited overnight.

In the morning, the bears were trapped in the cages, two cubs in one and the adult in another. Television footage showed the cages being taken out of the factory and placed on a pickup truck with a crane.

Misato issued an urgent message to residents that all three bears had been captured. Media reports said the bears were later killed for fear that they would return to the town and pose a threat if released.

Akita’s governor, Norihisa Satake, who had sounded the alarm over the increase in marauding bears in the prefecture, told reporters that he planned to seek the central government’s support to combat the bears, including revising wildlife protection law to allow the use of hunting guns in residential areas.

“Otherwise we cannot eliminate bears in residential areas,” Satake said. “The problem is growing around the country.”

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