



Part (D): Burmese Migrant Workers Issues

Ministry of Labor vows to control alien migrants —no pregnancy or they will be sent back.

(Saw Ku from IRC)

[LEAD] Being afraid that Thailand will be flooded by the huge number of migrant's children, the Minister of Labor has proposed a birth control plan [for the migrants]—sending the pregnant labor back. The remark was made without fear to be condemned. It was revealed that the number of illegal labor force is not less than 1 million. [The government] should speed up the framing guideline. NGO slams[the idea] for going backward, suggest better family planning campaigns.

[Body] Mr. Chalermchai Sri-on. The Labour Minister is preparing to set up a measure to control the unregistered migrant labor. The Minister revealed that the Migrant Labour Administration Committee had considered to seek appropriate measures and set up principle [to deal with migrant workers].

The committee gave nod to proceed the management of the unregistered migrant labor and include them into the system. The number of this group of people are expected to be at least 1 million. No other agencies can give a more accurate number even the National Security Council.

The Department of Employment, Ministry of Labour will proceed with 2 plans, 1) a continuation of the national verification process, 2) start registering those who have not been enlisted in the NV, while waiting for being sent to NV as agreed with their home country.

Mr. Chalermchai said the framework which has been approved by the commit-



tee is to identify the total number of migrant workers, how many are working outside the system or how many are working illegal. The new proposed procedure is to record all data in a work permit paper which is similar to a passport. Personal information, fingerprint, facial structure, history of residency, registering district, and the owner's photograph will be included in the new document, so that they can be traced when changing workplaces.

“We have to accept that the current documents are mixed-up sometimes by cut/past pages. The new document will solve the problem. The new registration will enable [the government] to control [these people]. The more important thing is it will enable these people to access health service, so we can trace back contagious diseases. Every party now has to accept that numerous number of illegal migrant labor are working in Thailand. If we don't do anything we will not be able to control the situation at all. Neither can we push them back. This is a hot issue that we have to fix.”

The Minister said that if all illegal workers were pushed back, it is believed that Thailand's economy would be in trouble. However, for the time being, no one knows the exact number of these illegal migrant workers. If all of these migrants were brought up on the ground [so the total number is known], we will be able to answer the questions asked by the society and the international community –how the Thai government is taking care of their human rights, how we let these migrants work without being taken advantages or exploited by human traffickers. In the pass, they have been discriminately/selectively arrested and there have been a lot of complaints on the issue.

“Only on the subject of their children, we don't really know how many babies are delivered per year – but the number is huge. Some countries have restrictive policy, they sent them back immediately when found pregnant. So, they must do birth control or will be sent back. However, by humanitarian principle, we will surely take care them. “

When asked if his proposal for birth control will attract criticism from human rights activists, the Minister said his remark was just a concept. If we do not do anything, we will be condemned anyway. The important question is why other countries can issue regulation to control migrant workers but Thailand cannot. This is the time that we have to regulate and systemize the migrant workers. Not only those from Burma, Lao, Cambodia, but also those from Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal and others. Although the regulation will not be finalized in 3 or 6 months but we should start laying the foundation now.

Meanwhile, Mr. **Adisorn Kerdmongkol**, the manager of the project —quality of Life development for migrant workers and people with national status problem, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, commented that the birth control policy



does not seem effective. As these migrant workers are mostly those fleeing the conflict from their home country and cross the border into Thailand. They definitely want to bring with them their family members. Even if we send them back, they will keep re-entering. The practice will force them to live in hiding for fear of being repatriated.

“The concept seemed going backward. Prior to this, there was a policy to allow children with nationality problem to enroll in Thai schools. One possible way to solve the problem is to support family planning scheme, as this is their actual problem. The government should also encourage these children to get educated, so they can use their knowledge to develop our country, rather than sending them back to the conflicted area.’

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