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Readers' Front

Dear readers,

We invite comments and suggestions on improvements to Kaowao newsletter. With your help, we hope that Kaowao News will continue to grow to serve better the needs of those seeking social justice in Burma. And we hope that it will become an important forum for discussion and debate and help readers to keep abreast of issues and news. We reserve the right to edit and reject articles without prior notification. You can use a pseudonym but we encourage you to include your full name and address.

Regards,
Mon Refugees Face Food Shortage

Kaowao; July 16, 2008

Kuala Lumpur -- A group of Mon refugees in Klang, near Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, are facing a food shortage by eating only rice shared with them by the local migrant community, a social worker said.

In one single storey old wooden house alone 31 boys from Ye township have been sticking together and eating only a small portion of food provided by other refugees and migrant workers nearby.

"They look for any edible leaves nearby but they also dare not go out during the day, fearing arrest by the police," Nai Plu, a community leader said.

There are about 200 refugees in the Klang area aged between 18 and 42 years; only nine asylum seekers have been registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office. These refugees, including young children and women, are asking for help with food supplies however they have no contacts with NGOs and assistance groups. Most of them came to Malaysia from Ye Township, southern Burma.

"We have no food and no jobs. Some UNHCR officers came here to see Mon orphaned boys, with a Mon interpreter, and we told them about our situation," said Nai Plu.

Everyday these hundreds of refugees face the risks of disease, a lack of food and other associated problems borne out of living in very poor conditions.

According to Nai Lawi Mon, Chairman of the Mon Refugee Organization (MRO) based in Kuala Lumpur, there are more than 30,000 Mon refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia and most of these refugees are not registered by the UNHCR office. They are hiding in jungles and living together in local areas, separate from the non-Mon community in fear of detection and arrest by the police. Refugees are occasionally arrested as illegal immigrants. Many refugees face serious abuse by human trafficking rings along the Thai-Burma border. The UNHCR can accept only limited numbers and asylum seekers are left as illegal immigrants. Without a proper document, it is very difficult to approach hospitals and clinics in times of illness.
Mr. Thomas Mills, Project Attorney from the United Methodist Committee on Relief based in New York, met with Mon refugees and encouraged them not to give up hope. He stated that if about 70% of Chin peoples were resettled to third countries and why then couldn't other ethnic peoples from Burma expect the same.

On a positive note, Lawi Mon added that on the 9th of July 57 Mon were registered at Johor Bahru by the UNHCR's mobile registration program. Alongside other Burmese ethnic minorities, in early April this year 147 Mon refugees were registered by the UNHCR.

Human rights violations continue in southern Burma, leading hundred of ethnic Mon to flee to neighbouring countries, including Malaysia and Thailand, in search of a better life. Often however they wind up living in appalling conditions with little or no human rights adhered to.

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FEATURE: Drug Addiction in Mon Migrant Communities

Siha Ong / Kaowao; July 15, 2008

At the Annual General Meeting hosted by the Mon migrant community in Klang, near Kuala Lumpur, Master of Ceremonies Nai Plu took the opportunity to boldly come forward and request action on alcohol and drug abuse among migrant workers, saying, “I propose that leading members lead the working committee by taking an oath to stay drug free and prove their worth as good role models.”

The meeting was organized by migrant workers from Ye, southern Mon State, and aimed to gather together diverse leaders in the community and to promote development initiatives for their home villages in Burma. Central in everyone’s minds, however, was how to reach out to the Mon community in providing psychosocial support to tackle depression and isolation.

Most members are related to one another through marriage and grow up calling each other sister and brother. “Burmese feel disconnected being away from their family and feel under strong pressure to send money back home to support their parents,” says Nai Min Oo, a leader from the Mon community in Klang, Malaysia.

Most Burmese face new social circumstances living away from their traditionally conservative villages and are ill-prepared for the life of a migrant worker. Social workers say that the Burmese in Malaysia are in need of psycho-social programs that inform them about the risks associated with unprotected sex, as well as drug and alcohol abuse.

With ever greater number of young people leaving Burma to escape human rights violations and poor economic prospects, the governments of host countries that use their cheap labour to support their burgeoning economies need to implement education programs for young migrants who face many challenges living away from their families.
“The wave of drug abuse is sweeping over our community and is a cause for deep concern,” Oo told a Kaowao reporter. “Substance abuse among young people in the Mon migrant community is a growing concern.”

**Psychological Stress and an ‘Easy’ Way Out**

“I don’t want to think about home, I need to make my life happy here,” said Mehm Wan*. Wan, 30, who left his village five years ago, flew in from Rangoon with a valid Burmese passport, but lost his legal status when he over-stayed. While some are successful at finding legal status, many thousands of undocumented workers reside in the poor suburbs, many having to live out in the open.

“My work is not stable and I am finding it impossible to send money home to feed my family.” Wan currently works in a car repair shop, but now faces a debilitating drug addiction. Wan tells how he became addicted to drugs to escape loneliness and forget about his loved ones at home.

“My co-worker gave me a pill one day and said this will make you happy, I had no idea that I would become addicted to them,” he said.

“Now I earn about 30 Ringgit a day, but spend 20 for a drug called ‘Pea’ (Bean in Burmese language). I have to take 3 suits (9 tablets) to get high,” he explained.

An average drug addict spends about 6 US dollars a day on their habit, said social workers, noting that it had a serious impact on the families of addicts, draining them of financial resources.

**Growing Drug and HIV Problems**

Community workers say that the high rate of drug-abuse is compounded by the easy availability of a range of drugs circulating among the migrant community. However, the major drug traffickers and dealers are difficult to identify and health workers worry that those responsible may escape accountability leaving the innocent to face the consequences.

The tip of the iceberg was revealed recently with the arrest in Burma of Malaysian national Peter Too Huat Haw who is standing trial along with five other Myanmar nationals - Aung Min, Nay Tun Lwin, Kyaw Phone Naing, Kyaw Hlaing and Kyaw Kyaw Win for drug trafficking.

Another growing concern is the spread of HIV. A World Health Organization (WHO) report in 2006 stated, “Illicit drug use and a lack of sex education among the immigrant population in Malaysia is fueling the spread of sexually transmitted diseases in the country.”

“There has been a complete lack of commitment by the governments of both Myanmar and Malaysia to develop community-based outreach services. As a result, drug abuse and HIV are increasing by the day,” said a Mon volunteer social worker, Nai Mon Nyan. He went on, “A
major factor in its increase is living in limbo as an illegal migrant, but also the drugs are readily available on the street, especially among the community.”

“A couple from Yangon lives here and they don’t work like the rest of us in the factory. But they make more money than us by selling drugs, these tablets come from Penang. The pills, known as Pea, are sold for 3 Ringgit for one set (3 tablets) but some addicts use up to 6 sets a day," said a social worker from Klang.

Opium use has a long history in Malaysia, especially among migrant Chinese labourers who brought the drug with them when they migrated, along with the British who controlled the opium trade early in the 20th century. But with the increased popularity of drugs during the 1960's and the Vietnam War, the number of those addicted to heroin grew sharply.

Despite a long history of drug abuse with opium addiction the response to illicit drug use today has been largely punitive with the current goal of the Malaysian government to achieve a drug-free society by 2015.

Malaysia's war on drugs is an intensive effort of education, advertising, testing, rehabilitation, harsh mandatory penalties for drug use and the death penalty for possession of relatively small amounts of heroin, cocaine or marijuana.

**Compassionate Response Needed**

Another worker cited a lack of awareness on the consequences of using these drugs, “We don’t have specific programs or awareness campaigns to tackle drug abuse among the local community to educate our people, a more compassionate response by the Malaysian and Burmese governments, at the national and international level is needed,” Nai Nyan said.

Education on the abuse of prescription drugs, sleeping-pills and alcohol are not provided and there is no control on their distribution. Despite having suffered from the effects of opium addiction imported by the British, the recent policies to eradicate all drugs by 2015 in Malaysia do not include drug prevention programs and no public campaigns to warn Burmese migrant workers and refugees.

Investigations from local Burmese NGOs report a sharp increase just in the past year in the number of young teenagers using drugs, according to Mon social workers from the migrant communities.

Another worker from Penang says he sees more of his coworkers suffer from some kind of emotional breakdown associated with depression and drug abuse. “We sent one guy home because he was weak and acted disturbingly,” said Yu, from the Palean region of Ye Township.
It was common to see drug and alcohol addiction among migrant workers, but now social workers see more young people using drugs. When they meet each other and shake hands, there is a pill passing from hand to hand.

"Most migrants are living under poor conditions and their plight is ignored by the authorities. Social workers and migrant communities must take this issue seriously. Otherwise, many people and their children may face serious consequences and lose their dream of coming to work for a better life," said Htow Mon, a community leader from Klang.

*Not his real name

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Nargis 'Donations' Collected From Schools

Kaowao; July 9, 2008

Following orders from State Authorities, Village Authorities in many Karen state townships have been collecting donations for Nargis' victims not only from villagers but also from schools, according to a source from Hpa-an township.

A civil servant from the education department of Karen state told Kaowao that although 1000 Kyat had already been collected from each household in the area around June 20th, last week students from both High and Middle Schools were asked to collect more money from their parents.

A parent from Hton Eie village said, "We paid 1000 Kyat per household two weeks ago, and now we have to pay another 'donation', collect from us by our own children. I have three children at the village school so I have to pay another 1800 Kyat. That's not fair for poor parents like us."

He added that a teacher had threatened students who didn't pay the money to not return to school.

Forced donations have been frequent in villages across Burma in the wake of Cyclone Nargis, with many villagers facing threats if they fail to meet the monetary requirement demanded of them.

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Ceasefire Agreement Day between NMSP and SPDC

Kaowao; July 3, 2008

The In past years the anniversary of the ceasefire agreement between the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) has been a cause for celebration, with a large party held and well attended by leaders from both sides.
This year on June 29th a small party was held, at the NMSP office in Moulmein. In contrast to last year’s celebration, NMSP Senior Chairman Nai Rot Sa was absent, only officers attended, and although local monks were present it was widely acknowledged they were for show only, and did not hold much official presence. A spokesperson from the NMSP told Kaowao, “We invited high level officials from the SPDC based in Moulmein, but only one officer attended.”

The celebration was small, and speeches minimal; in total the official party last just 60 minutes. However NMSP members remained longer and discussed at length the current situation in southern Ye, where the SPDC has recently beefed up troop numbers in every village in southern Ye despite the 1995 ceasefire agreement stating troop numbers were not to increase in the area.

Although slated for discussions recently, as yet any official talks have failed to materialize. In their most recent meeting on the matter the SPDC sent only a junior officer who was unable to discuss the issue. Even before this latest rift between the parties, many analysts suggested growing animosity was present; the NMSP last year vehemently rejected the SPDC constitution and a major communication breakdown has been obvious for many months.

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Monks Forced Home from Rangoon

Kaowao; July 3, 2008

Authorities have been forcing local monks studying in Rangoon back to their home town monasteries prior to the beginning of the Waso lent period. Over 100 monks have now arrived at monasteries in their hometowns, including the Ye, Sein Ma Ma and Sin Phyu monasteries.

Authorities from Rangoon last week ordered monasteries to send any monks home that had lived there for a short time only; the order continued that those monks must be returned prior to the Waso lent period.

In line with Buddhist teachings, every monk must reside in the monastery at the beginning of the Waso lent period, during which they are not permitted to travel outside the monastery without permission from their head monks.

Monks from Bahan Township, near the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, told Kaowao that these measures are most likely aimed at reducing the number of monks in Rangoon and to separate them before August. August this year marks 20 years since the ‘88 uprising’ of 1988, while September will be the one year anniversary of last year’s ‘Saffron Revolution’.

According to Monks newly arrived in Moulmein from Rangoon, the authorities ordered monasteries to house no more than 10 registered monks and guests. Township authorities in
Rangoon will let only 5 guests stay at each monastery, and not allow any regional monks to begin their studies in Rangoon from July.

Villagers Angry as Forced Cyclone Donations Disappear

Kaowao; June 27, 2008

The amount of money donated to aid survivors of Cyclone Nargis has been grossly understated in the local media by Burma’s military rulers. With the Junta’s claims around eight-times less than actual amounts collected in villages, the statements have angered head villagers and according to local sources the township authorities are being blamed for the ‘misunderstanding’ between the military authorities and the donors.

State-run television station MRTV broadcast the Junta’s statements over the last two days, claiming that donations from Chaung Zon Township amounted to only 800,000 Kyat. A head villager, also a member of the group organized to donate money in the wake of Nargis denied the Junta’s claims. "We collected at least 100,000 Kyat from each village in this region (Chaung Zon) and sent an amount of over 4,500,000 Kyat to township authorities. The amount broadcast on MRTV is very different from the amount we delivered, so it is likely now to provoke a quarrel between headmen and the villagers who donated."

Township authorities from Chaung Zon, Mon state ordered over 45 villages to collect at least 100,000 each in post-Nargis ‘donations’, with a deadline of June 6th.

The head villager also commented that the donated money seemed to have disappeared when placed in the hands of township or state authorities, and as such he had no response when angry villagers approached him. They had carried out their duties as requested, yet something went wrong along the way.

Authorities in Mon state ordered local authorities to collect money in every village, in amounts of at least 50,000 Kyat or 100,000 Kyat in Chaung Zon and Moulmein townships. Authorities also forced donations from villagers in Ye town, Mon state, according to the residents. "We had to pay 1000 Kyat per house in the Aung Thukha block. They didn't give us any receipt or acknowledgement for our donations," a resident from Ye town told Kaowao.

Five People Sentenced to Death for Abbot Assassination

Kaowao; June 24, 2008

The Thai government last week handed down the death sentence to five of the eight people imprisoned over the assassination of the new Wat Wiwangkaram abbot Reverend Jorndimar in
The punishment was handed down on June 18th, 2008 in the Law Courts in Thong Pha Phoom, Kanchanaburi province, after extensive investigations which lasted over 12 months and ended after one of the men surrendered. A police officer from Kanchanaburi told Kaowao the convicted killers were sent to the Central Prison in Lopburi, and will have a chance at appeal in 45 days. All eight suspects were arrested within a month after the murder of the new abbot, who succeeded Reverend Ajar Tala Uttama, the founder of the Wangka Mon village.

The late Reverend Jorndimar had been a long-time follower of the late Reverend Uttama and was given charge of the temple when Uttama fell ill. Following his assassination at the temple by gunmen on December 29th, 2006, and after 74 days of respectful mourning by Thai and Burmese devotees in a lavish service sponsored and observed by the Thai royal family, Jorndimar was given full reign over the temple.

With a dispute over administration finances, the assassination of Reverend Jorndimar was planned by monk Eainda Kari and his followers, Nai Aung Nyein and Nai Nit who then recruited Nai Wun Mon and Nai Parni to implement the killing with three other men; these recruits were found in Ye Township, Mon State and were hired as 'hit men'. They were to be paid three million Baht after the successful killing, however when they received just 100,000 Baht Nai Wun Mon surrendered to authorities.

Reverend Jorndimar's funeral was held on January 26th, 2008 in Wangka village. He was a keen fundraiser for the Mon Buddhist Monks scholarship program to Sri Lanka for and was originally from Taranar (Karee Nar) village in Kyait Mayaw township, Mon state.

Reverend Uttama fled across the border at Three Pagodas Pass to Thailand from southern Burma in 1949, together with 60 Mon families, to flee the violence of Burma's civil war. He then founded the original Wangka village, which has since been flooded due to damming, and 23 years ago relocated to the new Wangka village located near the longest Mon wooden bridge in Thailand.

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Returned Nargis Volunteer Tells of Continued Crisis

Lawi Weng; June 24, 2008

Every day the coverage of Burma's Cyclone Nargis diminishes around the world. "After just one month news of Nargis dropped on news programmer's priority lists," said a foreign volunteer, Tom, newly arrived on the border after working for one month in Rangoon.
Although the world media coverage is fading, the crisis that followed the devastating events of May 2nd and 3rd continues, as each day Burmese cyclone survivors face food shortages. According to Tom, many cyclone survivors have been stealing food from each other in the Phyapon Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp.

The junta recently told Thai healthcare teams the post-Nargis situation was under control, and that the people of Burma no longer needed any aid. Having just returned from Burma, Tom stated that resettlement programs planned to run for two years would clearly need to be extended by at least another three. He went on to say, "The country is still in bad shape, with corpses still floating in the water and may survivors in desperate need of aid."

In the wake of Cyclone Nargis, the world tried to offer aid to Burma, but the junta largely refused any outside help. In recent weeks the UN urged world leaders to provide ore aid to Burma. The World Food Program (WFP) only received USD 35 million from post-Nargis donations; if further aid does not arrive soon the Burma arm of the WFP will be cut, leaving many cyclone survivors facing starvation.

The WFP has said survivors need more aid and they need water buffalos to resume their lives growing rice in the fields. Many water buffalos were killed by Nargis. Although the junta built schools and houses for the victims in Phyapon, Tom told us, "The people can't eat houses. They need food. These houses only benefit the Junta and their building contracting cronies."

Tom said a Junta team visited Phyapon and distributed rice and mangoes to the IDPs. There were five hundred families in Phyapon, and the team offered ten bags of rice and a handful of mangoes. The victims only accepted one small basket of rice and one mango, while the team took photos. The Junta did not visit again.

This photo opportunity was not the only way the Junta exploited cyclone survivors, as donated goods were readily available at roadside stalls. Tom said, "I saw clothes donated at the temple and the next morning I found the same clothes in the public market. The military officers were those behind it, and they don't try to hide their corruption."

This type of report only serves to solidify fears held by the international community, who voiced concerns about their aid reaching the people who needed it most, and not just the Junta. After refusing foreign aid some communities' worldwide expressed relief; many American reports stated their concerns that aid would not reach cyclone survivors but stop at the oppressive Junta.

Unfortunately aid restrictions have also been placed on local donors, even individuals who attempted to share food with their less fortunate neighbors. People in Burma are growing increasingly concerned that cyclone survivors may not survive for much longer. Concern is greatest for young children who lost their parents in Nargis.
Recently, in Three Pagoda's Pass on the Thai-Burma border, six children arrived aged 5-10 years-old. She said to a person who took her on the way river, "please don't offer me to other. I just want to live with Uncle" while other ate food from the people donate them.

Refugees from Myanmar find a home in Bangkok

By TERESA MALCOLM

Publication date: March 21, 2008

NCR photo/Teresa Malcolm: Daniel Aguilar Ortiz

Bangkok’s Wat Prok seems to be swarming with boys in the morning. Most are dressed in identical blue -- they get to play soccer this afternoon, so they wear their sports uniforms all day in anticipation, and some kids are getting in some early informal practice. Others come up to greet their teacher, an American Maryknoll lay missioner, with a wai, the prayer-like gesture of respect used in Thailand.

It’s only when classes begin that calm descends. After a “homeroom” in which these Mon children of migrant workers from Myanmar sing both the Mon and Thai national anthems, they disperse by age group to rooms on the grounds of this Buddhist temple or to a park in an adjacent Chinese graveyard. This morning they’re studying math. Other days it will be Thai or English.

Seventy-five children are taught -- 74 boys and one girl, ages 7 to 18. The girl is the daughter of the abbot’s secretary. The boys all live at Wat Prok, a temple in Bangkok for Myanmar’s Mon ethnic minority.

“Theyir parents will leave them here so that they can get some kind of education with the monks,” explained Daniel Aguilar Ortiz, 36. “And just to let them have a safer environment than where [the parents] are working at construction sites or factories.”

While the Thai constitution has guaranteed universal education, in practice it is not always available for immigrant children. Some of their parents may be in Thailand illegally, but many have a visa that allows them to work but confines them to a certain geographical area -- preventing the parents from visiting their sons here in Bangkok.

Phra Utara Wat Prok already had Catholic connections through Br. Matthew Peters (see main story), when Ortiz, a lay Maryknoll missioner from New Mexico, proposed the idea of a teaching program for the many boys in the temple’s care. Phra Utara, the monk in charge of the children, readily agreed.
“Before, from the moment I woke up, I had to be doing this, this and this with the boys, from waking up to going to bed,” Utara said through an interpreter. “Now I have the chance to rest a little bit. My responsibilities have lessened.”

He is the boys’ main guardian at Wat Prok, insisting that parents meet with him before dropping off their child. For about a week that new child will be homesick, missing his mother and father, Utara said, but soon they want to stay.

Ortiz agreed: When he has asked the boys if they want to go home, they tell him, “No, no, when I was at home all I did was stay in the house. I didn’t go to school, I didn’t have friends.”

Wat Prok is adjacent to a Chinese cemetery in Bangkok, and the Mon monks have added Chinese style statues on the temple grounds to appeal to that ethnic group. The boys themselves are “very tender” in the way they treat other boys, Ortiz said. “Volunteers here have started crying, watching the way the boys take care of each other.”

The lone girl, who lives with relatives, is just as well integrated, Utara said. “She’s like a boy,” he added with a chuckle. “She can really defend herself.”

As for daughters of the migrants, they are kept close to their parents at the worksites. “They don’t often have the same kind of education -- it’s more like learning to be a housewife,” Ortiz said.

The boys’ education at Wat Prok focuses on the skills they will need to make their way in Thai society. Ortiz teaches math and English. Two Thai women teach math and Thai. At 18, the boys will usually return to their families to join them working in construction or at factories. If their Thai is good enough, boys can sometimes get into trade or technical school, offering them opportunities such as opening a motorcycle repair shop.

Once when some of the boys copied each others’ math assignment, Ortiz explained to them that it’s not for a grade -- it’s so they will have the knowledge so they won’t get cheated on the job. They understood that. “The next day,” Ortiz said, “they did their own work.”

-- Teresa Malcolm

National Catholic Reporter, March 21, 2008

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Feature: The Plight of Nargis' Victims

Asohn Vi / Kaowao; June 19, 2008

The dilemmas facing survivors of Cyclone Nargis living in the Irrawaddy Delta grow everyday with meaningless restrictions now prohibiting the movement of people away from the affected
areas and into southern Burma. These people are fleeing in search of jobs and better living conditions in an effort to improve their near-destroyed lives and flee the places they used to call home but that can no longer sustain them.

Over 134,000 people were killed and around 2.4 million people have been severely affected by Cyclone Nargis which struck Burma on May 2nd. International aid agencies have estimated that of those severely affected 90% of are women and children.

The Junta's Home Affairs Department on June 12th issued orders for an increase in guards at the Sittaung Bridge to check all IDs and stop potential Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from moving away from Irrawaddy Division and return them to their destroyed homes. Sittaung Bridge is the only way to move from Irrawaddy Division to Southern Burma and is situated over 100 miles from Rangoon, the former capital of Burma. This new bridge checkpoint stops all travelers to Mon and Karen states and was set up just a few days ago following a directive from the authorities to local policemen and army soldiers in the area.

With the lack of jobs in Irrawaddy Delta, Kyaw Naing was attempting to find a better life with his family when he was stopped and checked at the Sittaung checkpoint, and subsequently returned to Pegu by the authorities. On the way however he was able to sneak away and managed to reach Southern Burma where he contacted Kaowao. His journey revealed the appalling treatment of ordinary civilians who have already undergone massive loss and tragedy in recent weeks. Kyaw Naing was unable to understand why the authorities arrested him and treated him like a thief or common criminal when his only 'crime' was attempting to remove himself from a situation where he was fast becoming one of the many living dead in the Delta region.

"I am wondering why the authorities prevent us. I just tried to move to gain some sustenance for myself. We didn't break the law and we're not thieves, although they treat us as though we are," said a 22 year-old man told with sadness etched all over his face. Kyaw Naing and six other relatives came from a village in Pyapon township, one of the areas in the Irrawaddy Delta strongest hit by the cyclone. After one night imprisoned at the Sittaung checkpoint they were moved to Pegu for transportation back to their village.

"But now I feel I shouldn't be afraid of them (the authorities) because this is also my country," said Kyaw Naing on June 15th as he arrived alone to Mudon Township, 18 miles from the capital of Mon state.

There are clear steps being taken now that seem set to kill survivors of Nargis, according to a Mae Sot-based aid group. "The military junta shouldn't prevent survivors on the way without helping because this is their own right in their country. The junta must take full responsibility for helping the victims," said Nai Okkar Mon, secretary of the Mon National League for Consolidating and Aiding based in Mae Sot, Thailand. He went on to say that some survivors fled to the closest border town after six weeks without aid which is not surprising given the junta's continued refusal of access for and contributions from international aid agencies,
alongside their continued prevention of basic materials from reaching millions of victims who have been fatally affected by the disaster.

In recent days the Junta has been offering 10,000 Kyat to villagers in an effort to clear out the IDP camps and demonstrate to the world the success of their alleged clean up. The amount of 10,000 Kyat is equivalent to enough money for rice for an average family for two days. Villagers who don't accept the money for fear of returning home are forced to return to their destroyed homes anyway, although the Junta claims their return is voluntary. Six weeks after the disaster most destroyed villagers remain the way they were shortly after the disaster, the stench of decay is strong as bodies lie strewn across fields and homes sit destroyed.

An assessment issued by the US Department of Agriculture last week said, "Farmers (in cyclone-affected areas of Burma) are yet to be supplied with sufficient food, viable seed, tools, livestock or replacement tillers and fuel," and the area affected by the cyclone, "normally accounts for roughly 60 percent of Burma's rice production." The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said some 52,000 farmers in Burma's storm-hit Irrawaddy delta will not be able to grow a 2008 rainy season rice crop unless they are supplied with farming equipment and seeds within the next two months.

The mistreatment of travelers is not confined to those moving away from Nargis-affected regions; on the way by train to southern Burma, northerners were subjected to many kinds of intimidation by the armed train-guards but were nonetheless allowed to travel provided they were able to pay bribes as requested. According to Kyaw Naing's brother Min Min, who arrived at a rubber plantation in Mudon on June 10th after a 350 Mile journey across Mon State, "Policemen checked our group and called us to their chief who asked us rhetorically, 'Are you all going ahead to the border town or to Thailand?', Just like that. We smugly showed our approval for temporarily staying in the border town, and he fined us 600 Kyat per person."

Many people left from the biggest area of rice production, Irrawaddy Delta, after Cyclone Nargis washed out the region. Many have fled, or attempted to flee, to southern Burma and border towns with these areas their only hope of liberation from starvation. "We can't plant the paddy there, and we do not have money for food during the plantation. It is not possible to start again without long-term supporters in there because we have lost all our resources. I know that there is a much better life here than in the Irrawaddy delta," Min Min told Kaowao's correspondent. There are more than 40 job seekers including women and children around Min's work field and all would like work in Thailand if possible.

Given the harsh plight and precarious conditions after Cyclone Nargis, the number of illegal migrants may rise in Thailand, with many human traffickers from border towns ready for an influx, commented a Human Right Group in exile. Of all foreign illegal migrant workers in Thailand 75 percent are from Burma and the rest from Lao and Cambodia. Most work in the so-
called '4D jobs', meaning Dirty, Demanding, Degrading and Dangerous with uncertain and low wages, poor conditions and no time off.

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 Our motto is working together for change and lasting peace.