Interview with SWRR Deputy Minister U Soe Aung concerning boat crash survivors in Yathedaung Township

By Min Thit (MNA)
Photo: Nay Lin

Deputy Minister U Soe Aung answers questions by journalists during his interview at Nga Khu Ya receptiion centre yesterday. **PHOTO: NAY LIN**

Men and women enter separate housing facilities during their stay at Nga Khu Ya reception centre.
PHOTO: NAY LIN

An independent local media group gathering news in Maungtaw Township on 14 and 15 June interviewed Deputy Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, U Soe Aung, who is in Nga Khu Ya Reception Centre to supervise assistance given to the boat crash survivors from last week.

Q: Can you tell us about the resettlement progress for the boat crash survivors? We've heard some of them are Bangladeshi citizens, so how will you deal with that too?

A: Authorities found 104 boat crash survivors on 11 June and brought them to the reception centre. We know that 12 are from Bangladesh and 92 have previously lived in either Buthidaung or Maungtaw Township.

For the twelve people who claimed to be from Bangladesh, our Immigration Director contacted the Bangladesh Consulate in Sittway. The consul talked with them through a phone but said he wasn't satisfied and will come interview them at an undefined date after 17 June. The twelve Bangladeshi citizens claim they have ID cards and if the consul approves after the interview then we will follow proper diplomatic protocol.

For the remaining 92 people, they have different objectives. Some of them say they were returning from Bangladesh, some were going to Malaysia to work; all twelve Bangladeshi were going to find work in Malaysia; and they had to pay Bangladesh taka (BDT) 20,000 each to the boatmen. The total cost for each of them is said to be BDT 200,000 (approx. MMK 3,221,275).

We think the boat was damaged from bad weather and the boatmen docked at the nearest coast. We have reason to believe the people who claim they are from Buthidaung and Maungtaw have stayed in camps on the Bangladesh side.

We asked them what they would like to do next and they replied they want to resettle back here. But most of them say they still have relatives back in the camps in Bangladesh. So we are contacting their nearest relatives in other villages.

The next step would be building houses for them in the village they are resettling and working with Bangladesh to repatriate their relatives from the camps over there.

Q: When we were talking with the boat crash survivors they told us they didn't receive the repatriation forms from Myanmar during their time in the camps. Can you comment on that?

A: Union Minister Dr. Win Myat Aye faced a similar issue when he visited the camps in Bangladesh. The displaced persons at the camp there told him they didn't receive any sort of forms for repatriation, so the union minister explained it to them.

We have included these forms for repatriation in Myanmar and Bangladesh's agreements and we have sent the forms to Bangladesh as well. We contacted them and taken diplomatic actions to remind them of the importance of the form and distributing them. The previous batch that arrived here are already in the process of resettling in their native towns with the aid and support we agreed to give.

Q: We know that you have build houses for the Mro ethnic people but when we met with people from the Islamic community they said no one's come to rebuild their burned down houses. What is your response to that?

A: We've completed rebuilding the 22 houses burned down in Pantawpyin near Maungtaw and in fact people are already living there. Then there's the ongoing construction of 60 houses Kyainchaung Taung. We signed an MOU with India for the project and the Indian Government selected the company to head the project. We help people rebuild their house as close to their native town as possible.

Q: Can you tell us how many people have returned from Bangladesh, both legally and illegally?

A: Currently no one has returned from Bangladesh legally. A family of five returned of their own choice. A group of 62 people returned sometime ago and now there are 92 people at the centre here. These people were not returned by the Bangladesh government. They returned of their own choice. ■

Flash floods in Taninthayi, Mon State, due to intense rain

THE towns and villages of Mon State and Taninthayi Region were flooded yesterday, the meteorology and the respective information and public relations departments (IPRDs) reported.

Owing to the heavy rain and wind yesterday, floods were seen in the Taungwine quarter of Mawlamyaing Town. Many houses were flooded, and over 100 people, including children and old men, were stranded in some buildings. Rescue measures were undertaken to help them.

Similarly, floods were witnessed around Mawlamyine University, Mawlamyine General Hospital and some government offices. Patients in the General Hospital were successfully shifted to safety, according to officials.

The floods damaged electric lamps and trees, while the Thanlyin Bridge (Mawlamyaing) was closed to the public.

Floods also occurred in Thanbyuzayat, Paung and Ye townships in Mon State. The public was rescued by government officials, according to the information and public relations departments in the flooded townships. In Thanithayi Region, floods due to intense rain were reported in Kampani Village in Kyauksin Village-tract.

A dam in the region broke owing to the intense rain.

Likewise, in Kalein Aung Town in Dawei District in Thanithayi Region, a road near milepost 3 and one furlong was flooded by Dawei River. The public experienced traffic problems in the town. The losses incurred because of the floods could not be estimated, according to the Thanbyuzayat IPRD.

—Townships IPRD ■