



កម្ពុជា ហ៊ុនឆ្នាំ ២០០៣
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MON RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MONTHLY REPORT

MARCH

2003

The Five Points of the Aim of Mon Relief and Development Committee

1. To provide temporary settlement to the refugees in Thailand-Burma border areas; to who become homeless and helpless situation due to the oppression of Rangoon military regimes.
2. To help the welfares of the refugees in border areas and IDPs who are displaced inside the country, with foods, shelter and possible protection.
3. To coordinate with local Mon people in developing the grassroots community in the fields of health, education, literacy, agriculture and other rural development projects.
4. To empower the local community for the participation of decision making processes for their own lives and communities.
4. To struggle for the human rights.

The Organization of Mon Relief and Development Committee

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Nai Wongsala Pala | - Chairman |
| 2. Nai Kasau Mon | - General Secretary |
| 3. Nai Dung Htaw | - Member |
| 4. Phra Htaw Son | - Member |
| 5. Nai Glae | - Member |
| 6. Nai Chit Nyunt | - Member |
| 7. Nai Tay Jae | - Member |
| 8. Nai Jon Dae | - Member |
| 9. Nai Chan Done | - Member |

Monthly Report of Mon Relief and Development Committee (March 2003)

The paddy cultivation and other livelihood in the Mon Resettlement Sites

After their return from Thailand, the returned Mon refugees have tried to produce some rice to support their families besides the assistance they received from the aid agencies. They also have tried to produce the small amount of food for the population in the resettlement sites however the geographical and security conditions have not allowed them.

Soon after the return, the refugees who still do not arrive to their native places with dignity, have remained in three Mon refugees resettlement sites, Halockhani, Bee Ree and Tavoy. The MNRC (the former name of MRDC) planned and encouraged the refugees to find lands and do cultivation in high lands or mountainous areas.

In the 'slash and burnt' method of paddy, the refugees have to shift their farms every 3-4 years and they found more and more difficult to have available lands. After 6-7 years of cultivation, every farmers have shifted at least two times and tried to find the third spaces of lands for another cultivation. Therefore, their farms have been more far from the resettlement sites every time they shifted or found new cultivated lands.

Normally, in February and March, the refugee farmers started their cultivation. After they found their lands or if they have the old hilly land, first they have to clear grass, bamboo and small plants in their lands. If there is an old lands, they could clear easier than the new lands. If the farmers found the new lands they also have to cut some trees in the forestry areas or they have to clear all grasses and small trees under those trees.

After land clearance, they have to put the grass, small trees and bamboo to be drought until April to be ready to burn them into ashes. After burning, the lands would be ready for the cultivation.

In Halockhani resettlement site, the farmers are still in fear of land-mine and many of them abandoned their lands where they believed there are still land-mines. They believed there was still a lot of factory made land-mines in the southwest part of border area and these are still to harmful for the farmers to walk along the jungle roads and along the streams in the area. Some farmers also abandoned their lands and stop cultivation this year. Some tried to find in another area which are too far from their sites.

Last year, the farmers number in Halockhani was less because of armed conflict happened in the area. This year, the farmer number increases with small number and not like Year 2000 paddy cultivation years. Due to border dispute (unclear border demarcation between Burma and Thailand) in the previous years, most farmers would not like to find lands in the area close to border areas, because their lands could be confiscated by the Thai authorities.

The number of farmers in Bee Ree and Tavoy are normal and no much increase. Among many families in these two sites, only 30-40% of the total families have lands to grow paddy. Other families including female headed families, elderly people families, disabled families could not find lands to grow paddy. They participate other livelihood activities to support them or to get money and buy food from other people.

In 2002, MRDC also provides the assistance to farmers in creating of agriculture bank and borrowing money without interest to increase their activities in agriculture and other livelihoods. Hopefully, the small amount of money to each family would help to find seeds to grow crop trees for their long-terms plantations and other livelihood.

The security in Halockhane resettlement has been better and many people who fled during the conflict time of 2002 have gradually returned back to Halockhane again. Some families who arrived back in February and March, do not have enough time to find lands for paddy cultivation and joined in other livelihood to get some income. Especially, finding broom grasses and selling to traders from Sangkhlaburi, the small Thai border town, is their main activity for the period of two months income.

However, Bee Ree and Tavoy returned refugees do not have opportunity to find broom grasses and sold to Thailand as the border points close to these sites were shut down for several years. Among these sites, Tavoy site is an isolated site and could not make the money or income in trading or finding forest products.

Forcible Buying Paddy in the Mon State

In the Mon State, there are 10 townships which groups into two districts of Moulmein District and Thanton District. Among the famous paddy-growing regions in Burma, the Mon State has also a large paddy growing lands and most of the local Mon ethnic people are paddy-cultivated farmers.

In every year, accordingly to the state regime's orders, Agricultural Products Trade Department (APTD) have opened many paddy-buying centers in all 10 townships and forced the farmers to sell their paddy at low price that is 8-10 times less than the current market price in 2002-2003 paddy-buying period, which takes from November 2002 to March 2003. During 2001-2002 paddy-buying period the price of paddy was only 3 times than the price paid by authorities, but the paddy price rocketed up in this year because less amount of paddy produced in Mon State.

In the buying paddy from farmers, the local authorities have used various ways including threatening to confiscate lands or detaining them or confiscated their properties if the farmers are unable to sell their paddy. In order to manage buying the amount of paddy from the farmers, the local authorities also paid advance payment to every farmer about one-third of total payments during the farmers are planting their plants (in August or September). It means that the farmers must agree to sell their paddy to the buying centers and if the farmers could not afford to sell their paddy, the manager or the head of the buying centers could call the police to arrest those farmers. Or they could confiscate the lands owned by farmers.

Normally, the local farmers always refuse to receive the advance payments provided by the authorities, because they do not want to sell the set amount of paddy to authorities. However they are forced to take money and sign the contract that promising they would sell their paddy after harvest season.

In Mon State, there are about 10 townships: they are Bee-lin, Kyaik-hto, Thaton, Paung, Moulmein, Chaung-zon, Kyaikmayaw, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat and Ye, and the majority of the people in all Townships have involved in paddy cultivation. In Mon State alone, the SPDC planned to buy over 5 millions baskets and the local authorities' main targets are in Mudon, Paung and Chaung-zon Townships, where large lands are cultivated with paddy. (One basket of paddy is about 46 pounds – Editor note.)

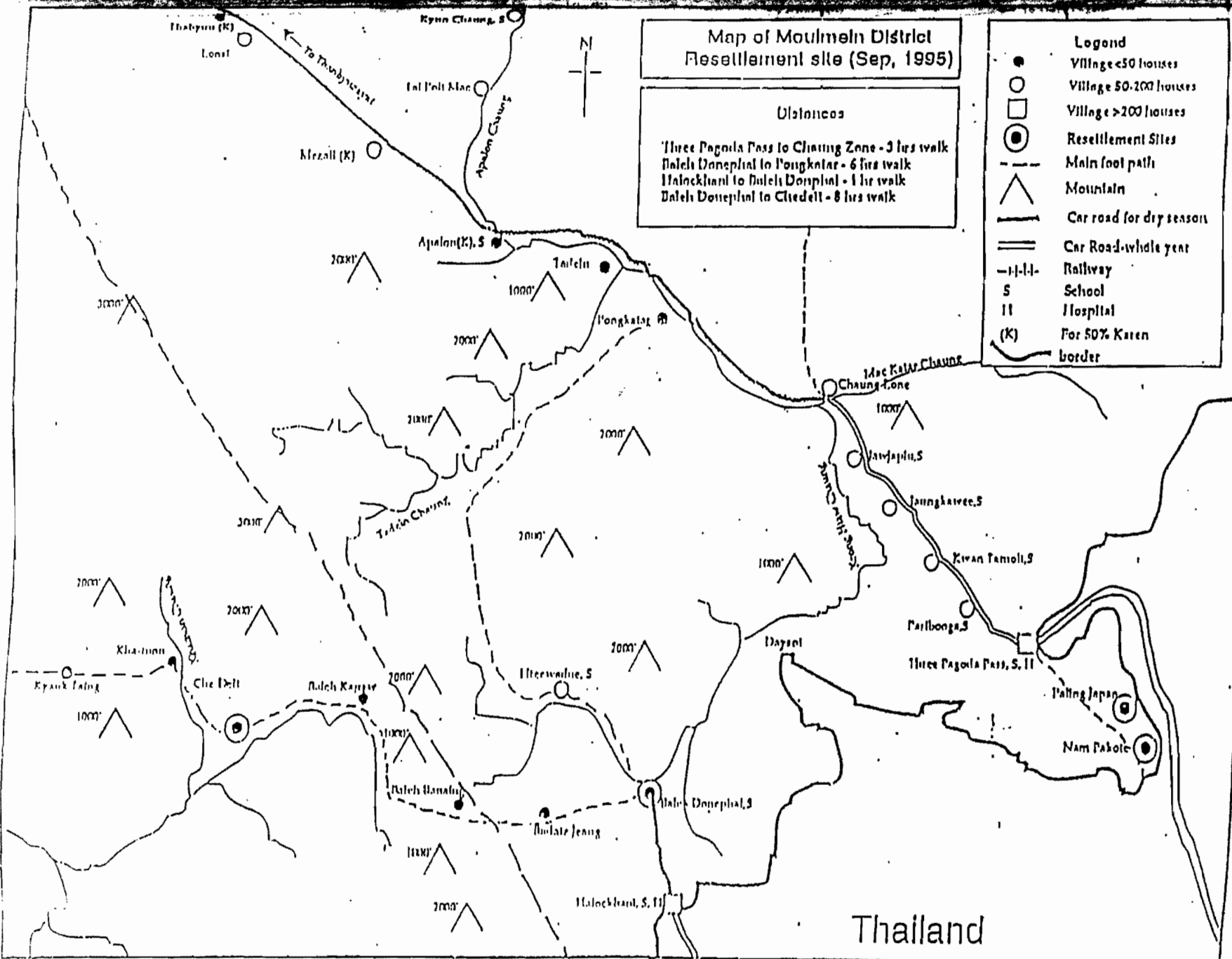
The authorities from APTD have set the amount of paddy that needs by farmers to sell to their paddy-buying centers. Depending on the land and soil quality in each Township, the set amount of paddy to be sold to the authorities have also varied. While the authorities set to the farmers in Mudon Township to sell 15 baskets of paddy per acre of land, they set to the farmers in Ye Township to sell 10 baskets of paddy per acre.

THE REFUGEE POPULATION OF THE THREE RESETTLEMENT SITES
(February, 2003)

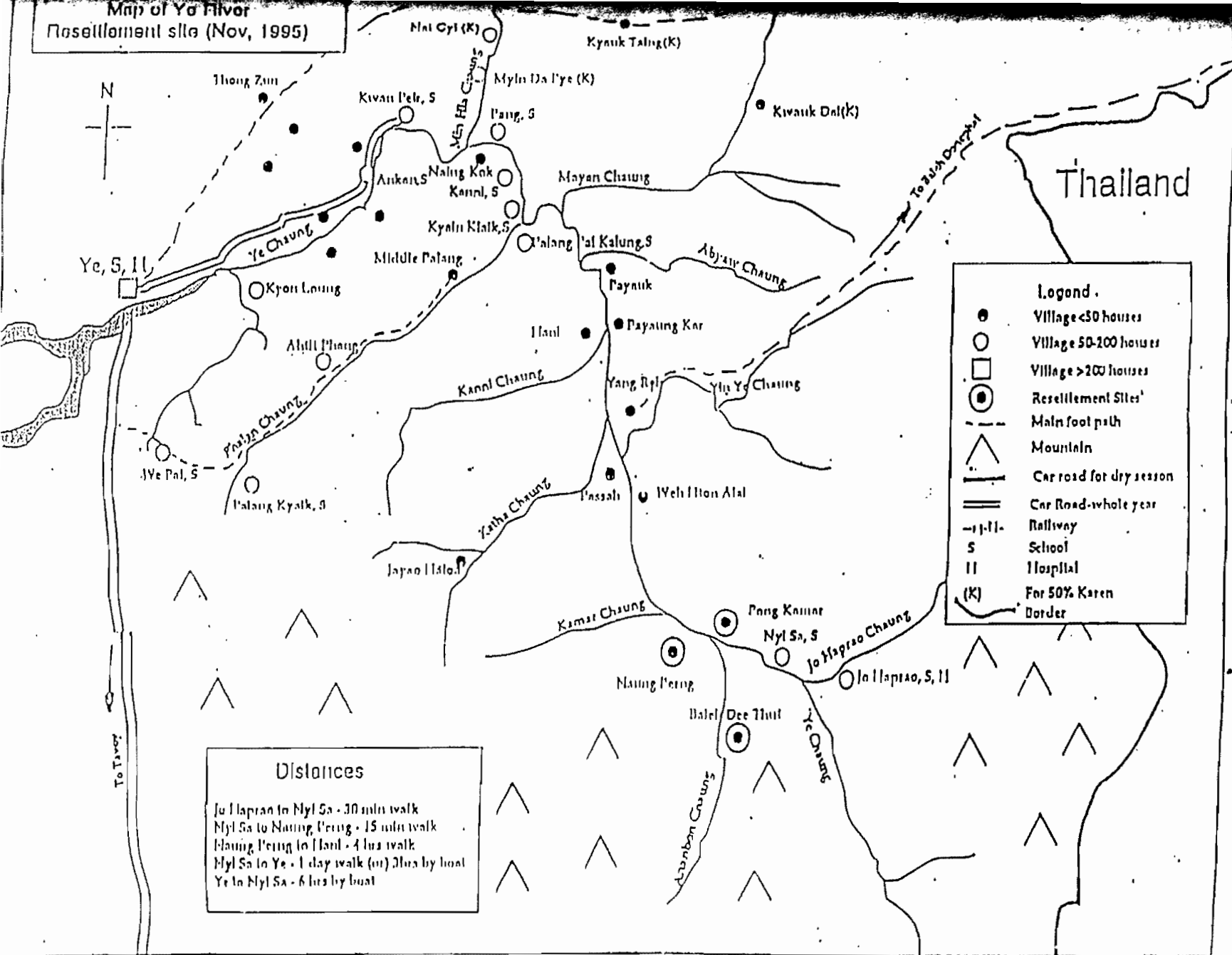
No.	Camp	Number Family	Over 12 years		5-12 years		Under 5 years		Total
			M	F	M	F	M	F	
1	Bee Kee	668	1196	1300	409	415	168	197	3685
2	Tavoy	620	1045	1042	398	396	189	191	3261
3	Halockhani	922	1578	1647	477	491	271	315	4779
	TOTAL	2210	3819	3989	1284	1302	628	703	11725

THE MATERIALS RECEIVED
BY THE MON RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
(February, 2003)

No	Organization	Rice (Bag/ 50kg.)	Fish Paste (kg.)	Salt (kg.)	Bean (Kg.)	Remark
		-	-	-		
	TOTAL	-	-	-		



Map of Ya River
Resettlement site (Nov, 1995)



Map of Tavoy District
Resettlement site (Nov. 1995)

