

MAE SOT VISIT, 13-15 MARCH 2012

Report by PP Martin Brands



March 14, 2012 - Kids & teachers of Nya Li Ah Hta School in Mae Ramat district give us a loud & wet farewell!

President-elect Dieter Reigber, myself and my driver/assistant Khun Nah made the 9 hour/700km trip to Mae Sot on March 13 to visit 6 of the 20 schools of the *Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee* (BMWEC) as a result of a 1 million Baht project of our Rotary Club Jomtien-Pattaya for BMWEC from funds generously received from the *De Vaan Goosen Foundation* in the Netherlands. See last page for details on this gift.

Kids do appreciate that this money will be used for notebooks, teacher salaries, rent and maintenance of the simple school buildings, but prefer a more personal donation. At an additional expense of some 25,000 Baht we brought them milk, fruits, ballpoints and water pistols that come in handy during the Songkran festival.

Our March 13-15 visit is one in a series of visits since late 2005 to help Burmese migrants in the Mae Sot – Mae Ramat – Pho Phra districts of Tak province in North Thailand. There are some 2.5 million Burmese migrants in Thailand, mostly as a result of two decades of armed conflict in Burma. They are the poorest of the poor, with no rights. They contribute to the economic wellbeing of especially North Thailand.

At least half a million of these migrants are Karen, and they are mostly concentrated along the around 600km long border from Kanchanaburi in the South to Mae Hong Son in the North, opposite Karen State in Burma. Some 250,000 live in the Mae Sot – Mae Ramat – Pho Phra area, of which around 60,000 in two refugee camps (called 'Temporary Shelters' by the Thai government), of which Mae La is the largest with some 40,000 inhabitants. It takes too long to explain the complex background of these migrants. Current developments in Myanmar (Burma) are hopeful, but it will take many years before positive effects of this are noticeable and meaningful for the Karen, a nation of some 4.5 million with its own culture and language. Burma has some 130 of such minorities, often quite small.

We used the school trip also to visit Pyaunglay field in Pho Phra district where bamboo huts of 32 migrant families were burnt to the ground as a result of a home-oven accidentally being turned over. *Social Action for Women* (SAW), a self-help migrant organization, requested support and our Club donated 80,000 Baht for assistance to the families that lost all their belongings.

And, to make the trip even more worthwhile, we met our team of 23 Peace Fellows who are following a 3-months course at the *Rotary Center for Peace and Conflict Studies* at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. They were in Mae Sot on a week-long field trip to learn more about 'the Burmese problem'.

Enough said. Let pictures do the rest of the talking!

March 14 – Nya Li Ah Hta School in Mae Ramat district



Typical migrant homes surround the school. The roofs are mostly of sheets of long grass or teak leaves.



Why is so much water needed? And why are the buckets on a table in front of us?



Barely visible: we brought a soap bubble machine that produces hundreds of bubbles. The teachers join in the fun. Milk and oranges are on the right.

March 14 – Nya Li Ah Hta School in Mae Ramat district



President-elect Dieter hands out milk cartons and helps with a straw or two.



With BMWEC's Naw Paw Ray in the middle, the Head Teacher receives ballpoints. Yes, we are prepared!

March 14 – Maw Law Tu School in Mae Ramat district



The school building (6 grades in 1 room) and an annex being built in the back.

March 14 – Maw Law Tu School in Mae Ramat district



Karaoke is inevitable on the last day of school. The vacation will last till early June.



Crowd control. "Stop making noise and close your eyes!"

March 14 – Maw Law Tu School in Mae Ramat district



Ballpoints and milk while waiting for electricity for the bubble machine. Fruit is also on the menu.



Finally some bubbles! When you are small it is a good idea to have your name on your forehead!



Bye bye! Yes, we got very wet.

March 14 – Pyaunglay field in Pho Phra district



On February 6, a fire destroyed 32 bamboo shacks, now rebuilt on higher ground



March 14 – Pyaunglay field in Pho Phra district



Left Two-year old Aga was caught in the fire. He just returned from spending 31 days in Pho Prah district hospital. The wounds on his leg have almost healed; both his arms need further daily care. SAW will bring Aga to the Mae Tao Clinic to see if further treatment in Maharaj Nakorn Hospital in Chiang Mai is required.

Right SAW Director Naw Aye Mar and her assistant Ko Myo proudly show bags that Rotarian volunteer Deborah Ralf from RC Coomera River Midday in Australia taught them to make for resale. Deb can be proud!

March 14 – The Best Friend School in Pho Phra district



No presents here, just watching the show & blowing bubbles, finally visible because of the dark background.



March 14 – Dinner with Peace Fellows at Kao Mao Kao Fang Imaginary Jungle Restaurant in Mae Sot



Two tables with almost 30 guests. 'Our' Peace Fellow Dr. Fernando Barrio from Argentina is on the left. An experienced PADI diver & rescuer, he will join us on March 25 for the Cross Bay Swim. KMKF restaurant is truly unique. Unfortunately the pictures do not show the spectacular tropical setting.



I must hold on to Fernando to make sure he will join us this time on the 25th!

March 15 – Talar Aor Klar School in Mae Ramat district



March 15 – Talar Aor Klar School in Mae Ramat district



Song & dance for the visitors! On the table is a typical, hand-woven Karen shoulder bag.



Bureaucracy at its finest; a fingerprint is needed to get milk, fruit, a ballpoint and a water pistol.



Less finesse was used to connect the bubble machine to a generator. It took some time, but it worked.

March 15 – Talar Aor Klar School in Mae Ramat district



Explaining the finer details of a water pistol, as if this is needed for Songkran-hardened kids.
Plenty of milk is waiting for later distribution.



Another crowd pleased!

March 15 – Elpis School in Mae Sot district



The milk and the 4-color ballpoints were highly appreciated. Sure, the ballpoint also writes on your hand.

March 15 – Elpis School in Mae Sot district



Filling the water pistols. Notice the Karen ponchos.



Bubbles everywhere! See you next time!

March 15 – Pyo Kin School in Mae Sot



Pyo Kin is one of the Muslim schools of BMWEC.

March 15 – Pyo Kin School in Mae Sot



And so ends another great visit to those that need our help! Thank you all for making this possible! Also, thank you, Paw Ray, Aye Mar and your staff for doing so much for others! It is a privilege to help you!

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

the related documents are available

Receipt of funds

For BMWEC project from <i>Stichting De Vaan Goosen</i> , the Netherlands	THB 1,008,043
For Pho Phra fire from Mr & Mrs Scholtes, the Netherlands	40,000
From anonymous donor	64,967
From BMWEC	<u>230</u>
Total received	THB 1,113,240

Use of funds

Bank transfer to BMWEC incl. 1,000 Baht bank charge	THB 1,001,000	
Bank transfer to SAW incl. 110 bank charge	80,110	
65 dozen of water pistols @ 20 Baht/pc	15,600	
130 dozen of 4-color ballpoints @ 60 Baht per 12	7,800	
Milk & fruit in Mae Sot	<u>8,730</u>	
Total spent		THB 1,113,240

Balance

THB nil

Approved use of funds by BMWEC*

Teacher salaries & rent for 11 schools, April-May 2012	THB 328,830
Stationary (notebooks) for all schools for school year 2012-13	515,944
Maintenance & sanitation improvements for all schools for school year 2012-13	104,926
Administration cost April-May 2012	<u>50,300</u>
Total	THB 1,000,000

Approved use of funds by SAW*

Medical assistance	THB <u>80,000</u>
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**Both BMWEC and SAW will provide detailed records on how the funds were spent.*