



# Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee

Po.Box 140, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand. Ph: + 66 89 268 7708. Email: [bmwecmaesot@yahoo.com](mailto:bmwecmaesot@yahoo.com)

October, 2012

Kyo so ba dae!

Welcome to the first newsletter on our new website.

We are hoping that the site will be a place where our community – including schools, families, partner organisations, volunteers, donors and friends are able to catch up with what we are doing, keep in touch with us, ask questions or make comments.

We also hope that if you are new to BMWEC, Mae Sot, the border and/or the current situation with respect to Burmese migrant education, that this site provides an introduction, answers questions that you might have, and maybe motivates you to become a little more involved with what we are doing.

This newsletter is an extension of the newsletter that we used to send out to our donors. As usual, our thanks to donors and volunteers knows no bounds! The existence of our Burmese learning centres along the border depends almost entirely on your kindness and generosity – for the gifts you give and the time and resources you put into working on our behalf.

Most importantly, our appreciation and thanks also goes to the teachers who work so hard to deliver the very best education possible to our children, and to the parents and communities who treasure and support the schools that serve them.

Our very special thanks this month goes to Victoria and her team at Urban Fox Studios for helping us develop this new site.

We truly appreciate the hours of hard work and the enormous skill that they have put into building a site which meets our needs and helps us communicate with such a wide audience.

Well done to those office staff at BMWEC who helped write articles and prepare information for the website. And a huge thank you to volunteers Lauren and Allison who patiently co-ordinated the collection and preparation of material for the website and this newsletter.

In the current newsletter we cover the following stories:

- Top story:
  - Working for our children's future: Myanmar authorities officially recognise migrant education
  - Karen State recognises Migrant Education: DVB news article
  - Official statement from BMWEC
- General update on what's happening at BMWEC: Answering a few FAQs
- New staff member: Asok Kumar
- Clean water for seven schools thanks to Rotary
- HELP accounting: Helping meet the vocational needs of young people in Mae Sot
- Rain, rain and more rain
- International Teachers' Day Soccer Tournament

**If you have ideas, comments or questions (about the newsletter, the website or BMWEC) please contact us at: [bmwecmaesot@yahoo.com](mailto:bmwecmaesot@yahoo.com).**

## Working for our children's future: Myanmar authorities officially recognise migrant education

On Tuesday, 25th September, a delegation led by BMWEC Chairperson Naw Paw Ray from the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC) began a two-day trip into Karen State to discuss the future of migrant education with officials inside Burma, including Karen State Chief Minister U Zaw Minn. BMWEC's plan was to initiate discussions that would enable co-operation between Burmese migrant schools currently delivering education on the Thai side of the border, and the Burmese education authorities.



Meeting with Major saw Moe Tho in Myawaddy

The three key suggestions raised by BMWEC, and supported by the Burmese Migrant Educational Support Foundation (BMESF), were that:

1. All migrant students attending learning centres in Thailand should have their grade levels officially recognised by the Myanmar Education Department, so that if students return to Burma they will be placed in the appropriate grade.
2. Year 10 students who have studied at migrant schools should be able to sit matriculation/university entrance exams inside Myanmar. (Note: Year 10 in migrant learning centres is equivalent to Grade 11 in Myanmar.)
3. The Karen State Education Department at state, regional and township level should work collaboratively with BMWEC and BMESF to improve and develop education for children and young people both in Thailand and in Karen State.

The group from BMWEC was met by was met just over the border in the town of Myawaddy, by the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) under the leadership of Major Saw



Hsa Eh meeting Chief Minister U Zaw Min

Moe Tho. This was an informal meeting, but Major Saw Tho offered to organise security and assistance for the group. He is committed to supporting the growth of education in Burma, and sees collaboration with BMWEC as an important step. The team were then able to head further into Karen State to meet the Myawaddy Provincial Administrator (District Commissioner), U Myint Tin.



Naw Paw Ray presents a painting by a migrant students to U Zaw Min

On the evening of the September 25, a meeting was organised with the Chief Minister of Karen State, Brigadier General U Zaw Min and other officials, including the Karen State Minister for Security and Border Affairs, Colonel Aung Lwin. It was at this meeting that BMWEC's agenda was raised. After discussing the current situation for migrant students, it was agreed by BMWEC and the Chief Minister of Karen State that they should work together to improve education for both migrant children and those within Burma, as well as improve communication and collaboration between the education groups on both sides of the border. It was decided that **all** migrant students should have their grade levels recognised within Burma, and that year 10

students have the opportunity to sit the Burmese matriculation exam. This is wonderful news for migrant students of all ethnic groups as it opens up opportunities for them in Burma that up to now were not available to them.

Prior to the meeting, BMWEC had prepared a letter to the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Thein Sein. The letter outlined the three key suggestions that had been presented to Karen State, and Brigadier General U Zaw Min agreed to deliver the letter in person, support the suggestions and recommend BMWEC to the President.

Overall, the meeting was extremely successful. Not only has a positive relationship with senior officials in Karen State been established, but moves towards negotiation and recognition at a national level have been initiated.

Following the meeting, U Zaw Min invited the group to visit the Karen State Parliament the next day. It was also arranged that the team visit two schools in Hpa An (the capital of Karen State).



Basic Education No! School, Hpa An

During their parliamentary visit, the group were able to observe the government discussing education issues. The visit was a great honour, as few people who are not part of the government are given this opportunity.



During the school visits to Basic Education School No.1 Hpa An (Kindergarten to Grade 11) and Basic Education High School No.4 Hpa An (Grade 6 to Grade 11), the BMWEC team had the chance to talk with teaching staff and meet students.



After visiting the Karen State Parliament and high schools, the BMWEC group returned to the Karen State Government to say farewell to the U Zaw Min and other officials who they met the previous day. Both parties acknowledge their importance of the meeting and expressed their willingness to continue working together and their commitment to a positive future for education for all our children.



## Matriculation Exam Preparation at Hsa Thoo Lei

Following the meeting with officials in Karen State, BMWEC has already begun preparing students to sit the Burmese matriculation (Grade 10) exam. If students pass this exam, they will have a recognised Burmese qualification that can be used to apply for university entry.



On September 28, 145 students from eleven schools sat a preliminary screening exam to determine those who would join a special preparation class for the 2012-2013 academic year. The screening test was open to current Grade 10 students and to those who may have completed Grade 10 in recent years and may now be studying in Grades 11 or 12. The screening test was also open to recent school-leavers.

Seventy students were selected from the screening exam and on the October 2, BMWEC established a class at Has Thoo Lei especially for the preparation of the matriculation exam. All students study English, Burmese, mathematics, physics and chemistry. Students were then given the choice of biology, economics, history or geography. 44 students chose biology and 26 selected economics. All students have completed the registration and will sit their exams in Myawaddy in March, 2013.

Teachers and students are working hard to ensure that the students are prepared well for the exams. Almost

all the teachers are working on top of their own jobs and are doing so voluntarily. They are all experienced teachers and all of them are committed to this new development in migrant education and very keen to see this group of student succeed. The students are aware of the honour and the responsibility of being the first to break new ground in migrant education. They are excited by the opportunity, committed to doing well, and some might be just a little nervous about the task they have in front of them.



### Follow-up

Saw Myint Khin, Deputy Director of the Myawaddy District Ministry of Education, and a small group of experienced high school teacher from Myawaddy visited BMWEC on Friday, October 5. They met with BMWEC and then stopped in to see the new matriculation class in progress. Once again, the meeting was very positive, and the teachers offered to return to spend more time with this special group of migrant students.

## Karen State recognises migrant education

*DVB (Democratic Voice of Burma – “an independent Burmese media organisation committed to responsible journalism”) published the following article about BMWEC’s recent ground-breaking negotiations in Karen State (<http://www.dvb.no/news/education-deal-targets-migrant-students/24056>).*

Published on October 2, 2012

### Education deal targets migrant students

By MOE MYINT ZIN



Burmese students studying in Mae Sot, Thailand. (BMWEC)

An NGO providing assistance to migrant children on the Thai-Burmese border has reached several agreements with the Burmese officials that will allow migrant students to enter government schools in Burma and take matriculation exams.

The Burmese Migrant Workers’ Education Committee (BMWEC) based in Thailand’s Mae Sot met with government officials from Karen state last week in Burma’s Hpa-an town. Karen state’s chief minister Zaw Min agreed to proposals presented by the group to allow students at migrant schools on the border to attend government schools in Burma. The deal will also allow students who are not attending Burmese schools to sit in on matriculation exams.

In Burma, 10th grade-students take matriculation exams that are mandatory for students who wish to study in further education in the country.

“This is a special privilege for migrant students [made] by the chief minister,” said the BMWEC’s director Naw Paw Re.

“We will be providing assistance to students of any race or religion who contact us to register for the matriculation exam – including undocumented students.”

The BMWEC has released a statement following its meeting with the minister, pledging to assist migrant students interested in joining government schools inside Burma or to help individuals register for matriculation exams. According to the BMWEC’s director, a test exam for migrant students was held on 28 September, which served as a prerequisite for the matriculation exam for the 2012-13 academic year.

## **Karen State recognises migrant education: BMWEC Official Statement**

On September 29, 2012 discussions took place between a delegation led by BMWEC Chairperson Naw Paw Ray from the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC) and a delegation from the Karen State Government, led by Karen State Chief Minister U Zaw Minn. The meeting took place in the Karen State Chief Minister's office and was part of BMWEC's plan to develop policies that would enable co-operation between Burmese migrant schools currently delivering education on the Thai side of the border, and the Burmese education authorities.

The meeting covered many issues relevant to education. The three key suggestions raised by BMWEC, and supported by the Burmese Migrant Educational Support Foundation (BMESF), were that:

1. Students studying in migrant schools should be able to continue their education in Myanmar schools in the grade that is suitable to their current level of education. The Karen State Government agreed to this, but added that this would only apply if student achievement had been certified by BMWEC.
2. Students who have studied at migrant schools should be able to sit for matriculation /university entrance exams inside Myanmar.
3. The Karen State Education Department at state, regional and township level should work collaboratively with BMWEC and BMESF to improve and develop education for children and young people living along the Thai-Burma border, both in Thailand and in Burma.

The Karen State Government not only agreed to these suggestions, but were anxious that the partnership should be implemented immediately. Students interested in sitting the Matriculation examination for the academic year of 2012-2013 must apply for eligibility and should contact BMWEC's Student Qualification Department as soon as possible.

Naw Paw Ray  
Chairperson

**BMWEC**

## General update on what's happening at BMWEC

The most consistently asked question, and the most persistently raised topic at the moment centres around how current changes in Burma/Myanmar are likely to effect the situation on the border. Specifically, we are often asked what sort of impact this is likely to have on BMWEC, and how we are responding to these changes and challenges as an organisation.

### **Will many migrants return to Burma/Myanmar in the near future?**

There seems to be a fairly widespread perception in the foreign media that the dramatic and positive political changes in Myanmar will result in large scale self motivated repatriation of both migrants and refugees.

However, for many migrants, their experiences of the past contribute to a lack of confidence in either the political or economic reforms that are promised, and they are likely to choose to remain in Thailand until they are certain that a better future is guaranteed for themselves and their children. As a local, young woman from the Karen community commented: "It is not the poor who are moving back to Burma, it is those with political connections and money". So, it is unlikely that there will be any significant decline in the numbers of children needing education in the border area in the near future. The need for decent, appropriate education that gives the children here a chance at a future is not likely to go away: (with apologies to Mark Twain) "Reports of our demise are greatly exaggerated".

### **Are the changes having any impact on the funding that you receive?**

The changes in Myanmar are definitely exciting and we are all hoping that they will have a profound and positive impact on the lives of ordinary people. It is inevitable, that many donors and NGOs are keen to participate in, and support the new democracy and the opportunities that it offers.

However, as the media and donors turn to face Myanmar, there is a danger that they will turn their backs on the border.

Together with the current world economic situation, this has made finding donors and funding more difficult than ever. Some of our donors, who themselves rely on donations from individuals, schools and communities in Europe and the States, have told us that they fundraising is more difficult at the moment than at any time over the last twenty years. So funding is more than a challenge at the moment – it is a crisis!

### **Has BMWEC made any changes in response to what is happening inside Burma/Myanmar?**

BMWEC acknowledges that although the numbers of migrant children needing an education may remain relatively constant in the near future, that it is important to be proactive in planning for change, as well as proactive in ensuring that children are provided with the education that they need to meet their full potential in different national contexts.

Many families have renewed hope that they will be able to return to their homelands in the medium term. For them, the priority is ensuring that their children's educational achievements will be the recognised by the relevant authorities in their home states and/or nationally. Some families may still see Thailand as holding the best future for their children, and some families and young people still want to be prepared for the option of attending an international college or university.

In trying to **plan** ahead, our most important step has been to negotiate a deal with Karen State, which means that children's education in migrant schools will be officially recognised by the state. This is huge news and we are excited by the possibilities that this raises for our children. The state has also agreed that migrant students can sit the Grade 10 exams, which are a prerequisite for university entrance in Burma. Again this is really exciting news! (for more information see the report above under the heading: Top story.

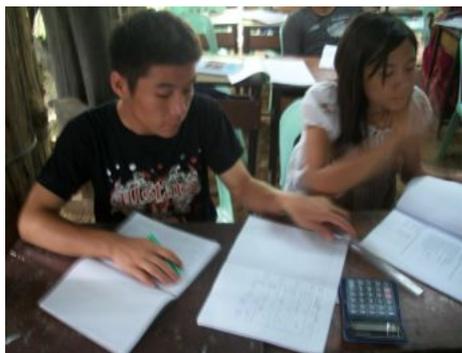
## HELP Accounting Opens



BMWEC is proud to announce the opening of a new post-ten vocational accounting school in Mae Sot at the beginning of the 2012-2013 academic year.

The Health, Education and Literacy Project (HELP) identified the lack of opportunities available for post ten students in Mae Sot and decided to run a course which teaches the London Chamber of Commerce International syllabus, levels 1 and 2.

In June 2012, head teacher Mr. Aung Myint Tin, held entrance examinations for students who have passed grade 12 or the Burmese matriculation exam. Two class groups were selected, one group to study on weekdays, and a second group to study at the weekends (allowing them to work in paid employment during the week).



In June, the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday classes began and in August the weekend classes started. Once students have completed the course they will have the opportunity to sit the official LCCI in Yangon, meaning they gain a recognised qualification.

*Teachers, students, and BMWEC are excited about this new project for young migrants and wish them well in their studies this year.*

## New staff member: Asok Kumar

We have recently appointed a new Finance Manager at BMWEC: Asok Kumar (Kumar).



Before coming to BMWEC, Kumar was working in Yangon, where he was working in a trading company. He wanted the opportunity to develop his experience in finance and was keen to work for an organization which was working for people. He commented that BMWEC is “like a strong-burning candle. With it you can light many other candles” - in this way, BMWEC lights the candle of education for many communities in Mae Sot and along the border.

Kumar’s family came to Myanmar from India many generations ago, his family settled in Bago Division, and this is where Kumar grew up. He gained a Diploma in Business Management in Phaunggyi, and then went on to do a BA in Business Science at the university of Yangon.

Kumar speaks, Burmese, Hindi and English and although he enjoys reading, listening to traditional Indian music and playing tennis or basketball in his spare time, he has not had much time to relax since he came to Mae Sot. At the moment, Kumar is putting in long hours at the office as he brings the accounts up to date and sorts out the complexities of running a busy CBO finance department.

We are really lucky to have Kumar working with us – and wish him the very best in this new job, and his new life in Mae Sot.

## Rain, rain and more rain by Queenwill Aung, Field Officer

There are three seasons in South-East Asia; summer, rainy season and winter. The rainy season starts in May and goes until August. The average precipitation is 353.5 inches in August. The rain was heavy throughout June and July this year, but in August it was almost constant for three weeks. Mae Sot's dams threatened to overflow, so the Thai officers released water to protect the town from flooding and prevent damaging the dams.

During these really wet days, some areas around Mae Sot experienced minor flooding. People living on the banks of the Thaung Yin River (known as the River Moe in Thailand), were especially effected and Thai rescue officers were kept busy making sure the people who live in this area were free from danger. The border check-point on the Friendship Bridge that crosses the river between Burma and Thailand was forced to close.

The heavy rain affected some of BMWEC's schools, especially those in remote locations such as Maw Taw Lu, Nya Li Ah Hta and Green Water. Due to the weather, the student attendance decreased: Some students and teachers were ill because of seasonal diseases such as the common cold and dengue fever; and schools situated in mountainous areas, such as Green Water, are susceptible to landslides. The roads leading to the schools become incredibly muddy, so parents felt that it was not safe for their children to walk the long distance to school.

In September, the rain eased and class sizes returned to normal. We look forward to clear blue skies and sunny weather over the next few months!



Students from Maw Taw Lu came with us after we visited, in case the BMWEC truck got stuck in the mud on the way out.

## International Teachers' Day Soccer Tournament

The Burmese Migrant Teachers' Association BMTA held a football competition to celebrate World Teachers' Day on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October, 2012. BMWEC was asked to participate by organising a male and female team. Each team had roughly around 15 players and all were teachers from various BMWEC schools. Even some head teachers decided to put on their football boots for the competition!

On Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October the men's team played against the Mae Sot teachers' team and were successful with a 3-2 win. The first women's game was on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October at Pa Ra Mi school football field. Although it was an early start, all players were excited and played well, resulting in a 4-0 victory over BMTA team 1.

For the second round of competition, the men's team played the Ban Song Kwin team and again were victorious with a 3-2 win. Wah La Shee, the logistics officer at the BMWEC head office, performed a hat trick in this game, scoring all three goals! In the women's second game against Help Without Frontiers they faced a challenging game and sadly lost 6-1.

The women's team turned it around in their third game winning 3-2 and then became runner's up in the competition. The men sadly lost their match on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October and were knocked out of the competition.



The women's team before their first match, which they won 4-0!

## Raffle Ticket Draw

BMWEC decided to be proactive about their current financial situation and organized a raffle ticket draw to raise money within the local Mae Sot community. Each school was given tickets to sell to parents and community members. The tickets were 10 baht each and a staggering 28, 800 tickets were sold! STTC, the vocational school, sold an amazing 8, 800 tickets, the most sold by any school.

Prizes included fans, cameras, lunch boxes, bicycles, a laptop and the first prize was a MOTORBIKE (which everyone was obviously hoping to win). On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, the raffle was drawn at Hsa Thoo Lei. It was a fantastic day where all BMWEC school communities came together. Students from a range of schools and performed dances for the crowd. A group of high school boys from Hsa Thoo Lei were wonderful emcees and kept the crowd entertained. The lucky winner of the motorbike was a young woman from Yangon and a Kindergarten student from Maw Taw Lu won the laptop, congratulations.



Overall it was an extremely successful event which raised 152, 138 baht (net profit) for BMWEC! This much needed money was spent on teacher salaries, rent and transportation. It demonstrates the community's determination to provide the best possible education for migrant students. BMWEC is proud of this fundraising success and is grateful to all those who contributed their time and money.