

Learning with the Irrawaddy 13

To accompany the September 2006 Issue of Irrawaddy Magazine

Selected article: *Broadening Horizons*, pages 16-17

Activities to do Before Reading

Activity 1

Title

The title of the article is *Broadening Horizons*. What do you think the article is about? What topics could be in the article?

Activity 2

Discussion

You are going to read an article about education for Burmese migrant workers in Thailand. Many of these workers want to continue their education.

- What do you think are some problems these workers have to continue their education?
- Why do you think they want to continue their education?
- What types of education opportunities do you think they can get in Thailand?

Activity 3

Prediction: True or False

Do you think these sentences are true or false?

1. There are over a million people from Burma registered as legal migrant workers in Thailand.
2. There are over 60,000 children under 12 from Burma working in Thailand.
3. Some Thai workers attend classes with Burmese migrant workers.
4. Recently, the Thai government has made it more difficult for migrant schools.
5. In Tak province, there are about 20 migrant schools.

Activities to do During Reading

Activity 4

Order the article

- a) Work in three groups. Your teacher will give you eight paragraphs on coloured paper. Your group's paragraphs make up 1/3 of the article – Part A, Part B or Part C. Put your paragraphs in order.
- b) Now discuss with the class which order each group should be in, to make the whole article in the correct order. Which colour is first, second and third?

Activity 5

Check the predictions

Scan the article, and check whether your predictions from **Activity 3** are right or wrong. You should scan the article as quickly as possible – don't read it for detail.

Activity 6

Comprehension

Read the article more carefully, and answer these questions.

1. Do people pay to attend the Burmese Migrant Education Program?
2. How old are the students in BMEP?
3. About what percentage of Burmese migrant children attend school?
4. What's Thein Lwin's opinion of education in Burma?
5. Why does Khaing May Oo want an education?
6. Why did the Thai government not allow migrant schools?
7. What did Htoo Chit do before forming GRHE?
8. What schools and organizations that teach migrant workers are mentioned in the article? Where are they? What subjects do they teach?

Activity 7

Vocabulary

- a) Go through the article and underline the words they don't know.
- b) Match these words and phrases with their definitions. There is one word or phrase from each paragraph – no. 1 is from paragraph one, no. 2 from paragraph 2, etc.

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|----------------------|---|
| 1. cut short | <i>to get</i> |
| 2. broaden | <i>helping victims of disaster, poverty or war</i> |
| 3. keen | <i>well enough</i> |
| 4. swelling | <i>enthusiastic, eager</i> |
| 5. prospective | <i>more</i> |
| 6. accommodate | <i>to affect other groups and places</i> |
| 7. obtain | <i>to give someone a place, include</i> |
| 8. grateful | <i>to think about something, want to know something</i> |
| 9. actual | <i>to stop something before it is finished</i> |
| 10. literate | <i>to understand how someone feels</i> |
| 11. rapidly | <i>most importantly</i> |
| 12. adequately | <i>quickly</i> |
| 13. sympathize | <i>to include more people</i> |
| 14. mixed ethnic | <i>because someone persuaded other people</i> |
| 15. wonder | <i>very important, urgent</i> |
| 16. sibling | <i>increasing</i> |
| 17. spill over | <i>likely to do something</i> |
| 18. at the urging of | <i>building, the building industry</i> |
| 19. relief work | <i>has parents from different ethnic groups</i> |
| 20. construction | <i>brother or sister</i> |
| 21. primarily | <i>feeling that you want to thank someone</i> |
| 22. additional | <i>able to read and write</i> |
| 23. vital | <i>to be useful</i> |
| 24. benefit | <i>real</i> |

c) Fill the gaps with words from b).

1. The war might _____ into neighboring countries.
2. There are many things we need to do to improve education. _____, we need to provide all people with a basic education.
3. I heard that education is free in Thailand. The _____ situation is that there are many costs, such as uniforms.
4. When the school opened, there were more than 1000 _____ students who wanted a chance to attend.
5. Free basic education is _____ to the heath of a country.
6. The situation is _____ getting worse, as the fighting increases.
7. My _____ are _____ to continue their education, so I need to make money to pay their school fees.
8. The training course was _____ because of security problems.

Activity 8

Problems and solutions

Here are some problems mentioned in the article. Who has these problems, and how are they solved?

Problem	Who?	Solution
Too many students want to join their classes	BMEP	
Concerned about his future if he is not literate and educated		Takes every course at BMEP
Expelled from Rangoon University of Technology		
Was working as a maid, but wanted an education		
Wants to pay her brothers and sisters' school fees		
Thai government did not allow migrant schools		
Child laborers were doing dangerous work, and not going to school		

Activities to do After Reading

Activity 9

Discussion

Work in groups. Think about the skills migrant workers might need.

Imagine that you have been given a very large amount of money to set up a school for adult migrant workers. Classes will take place in the evenings, after people have finished work. In groups, decide:

- What is the purpose of the school?
- What subjects will they have at the school?
- What levels will they teach?
- What resources will they get?
- Who will teach? What people will they hire as teachers?

Activity 10

Presentation

In groups, make a short presentation about your school. Try to persuade the class about the quality of your program, and give them reasons why they should attend it.

Pink Page

Burmese migrant workers in Thailand's northern city of Chiang Mai might be excused for wanting nothing more than to relax after a long day's labors. A growing number of them, however, choose instead to attend the Chiang Mai Learning Center to complete studies that most had cut short in order to provide for their families.

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Founded in October 2005 by the Burmese Migrant Education Program, the school offers courses in Thai, English and basic computer skills—all free of charge. The center’s goal, according to program organizer Dr Thein Lwin, is to give students an opportunity to broaden their skills. Some 200 students so far have signed up for courses, and the number is growing.
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“They are really keen to study,” said Thein Lwin, who is also principal of the Burmese teacher training program. “They want a professional education for themselves and for the benefit of their community.”
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Students, who range in age from young children to the elderly, choose their preferred time of instruction based on the requirements of their work schedule. The school offers two sessions each morning and evening, with two levels available in all subjects. Eight teachers currently work at the school, but the swelling ranks of interested students may soon require a larger staff.
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“When we first started the school, we passed out 200 application forms,” said Thein Lwin. “But we received 400 back. Someone made copies.” Not all applicants could be accommodated, as space was limited, and many prospective students faced transportation problems and time conflicts. The school eventually added mid-day classes for those who could not attend morning or evening sessions.
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Every attempt is made to accommodate each student based on their particular needs. “Though the main reason they come to Thailand is employment, they also want educational opportunities,” said Thein Lwin.
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Such opportunities are unavailable or difficult to obtain in military-ruled Burma. Most migrant workers attending the school are young people who have been unable to afford education at home or have gone to work for the benefit of their families.
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Sai Aung Aye, a student at the school from Lashio township in northern Shan State, is grateful for the opportunity to study. “It has been a long time since I’ve seen a book,” he said. “I am glad to be able to study and read again.”

Blue Page

According to official Thai figures, about 850,000 people from Burma registered as migrant workers in Thailand in 2005, though the actual number is thought to be over 1 million. There are also as many as 63,000 children under the age of 12 working as

migrant laborers. Thailand's education ministry says only 13,500 of these children attend Thai schools.

At 22, Sai Aung Aye has worked since he was 12, when he left middle school and fled the harsh conditions of Burma to work in Thailand. He has done his best to provide money for his family, but he knows that his future depends on being literate and educated.

After working all day at a construction site, Sai Aung Aye spends his evenings taking every course available at the school. His language skills have improved rapidly. "Now I can understand and speak a little bit of English. I can also use email and the Internet," he said.

Burma's education system, according to Thein Lwin, does not adequately prepare students for life beyond school. "They come here to work with half an education," he said. "Many don't even finish their basic education and have no opportunity for higher education. I know they want to study, but they have been deprived."

He sympathizes with his students' lost opportunities. Once a student at Rangoon Institute of Technology, Thein Lwin was expelled for his involvement in the 1988 pro-democracy student uprising in Rangoon. He obtained his PhD in education from Britain's University of Newcastle in 2001.

Khaing May Oo, a mixed ethnic Pa-O, spent three years working as a maid in Bangkok before seeking assistance to further her education. She sent a letter to the BBC Burmese Service and learned of Thein Lwin's school, after which she moved to Chiang Mai and began attending courses.

"Though I have to work, I always wondered whether I could attend school," said Khaing May Oo. "I want to be literate and earn my living in a career rather than the kind of work I've done so far."

Khaing May Oo finished her education after high school, and she came to Thailand to earn money for her siblings' school fees. "One day, after I save enough money, I hope I can return home and attend university." She currently works as a cleaner in a hotel near the Chiang Mai Learning Center. Every month she sends 100,000 kyat (US \$75) back home to support her five siblings currently enrolled in school in Moulmein, Mon State.

Yellow Page

The demand for classes has now spilled over to Thai migrant workers. Bundit, 32, an ethnic Thai Lahu, said he had completed year 12 of high school, but had decided to join

his friends in taking English courses at the school. “It is free, and the teaching is very good. I can come any time for lessons,” Bundit said.

Historically, the Thai government has taken a firm stand against migrant schools, since many of the migrants who attended were living and working in the country illegally. But recently, at the urging of Thai officials and NGOs, the Ministry of Education has eased restrictions and allowed an expansion of migrant schools and learning centers. Burmese communities in Bangkok, Phang Nga and Tak provinces now operate schools for migrant workers.

Htoo Chit, the director of Grassroots Human Rights Education, which helps Burmese workers in areas hit by the December 2004 tsunami, said the organization operates nine schools—six primary and three nursery—in Phang Nga province. After the tsunami, Htoo Chit did relief work in cooperation with the Tsunami Action Group. At that time, he found many children among the migrant workers in the area and decided that a long-term educational program was necessary to assist Burmese victims.

“When I was doing rescue and relief work, I saw more than 1,000 children working along with their parents,” said Htoo Chit. “They were child laborers working under dangerous conditions, and I thought they should be in school.” Children aged 12 and younger were employed in fishing, construction projects and agriculture. Others cooked and looked after their siblings while their parents were at work. “Some children could not read either Burmese or Thai,” said Htoo Chit. “I started to wonder if it would be possible to open schools after the rescue work was finished.”

GHRE opened its first school in July 2005, and after a year it has 32 teachers and 500 students learning primarily Burmese, Thai and English. The school also offers courses in math, history, geography and social science.

In Tak province, the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee operates more than 40 schools for the children of migrant workers in western Thailand. Many additional educational opportunities are now available from organizations such as the Young Chi Oo Burmese Workers Association in the Thai-Burmese border town of Mae Sot and the Bangkok-based Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma, which offers courses on Thai law and migrant worker rights.

Such programs are vital to migrant workers, according to Thein Lwin, because they allow workers to communicate more effectively with their employers and provide the foundation for greater opportunities in the future.

“I want youths to study and earn their living with a professional education,” said Thein Lwin. “After they become educated, their lives will be better and they will benefit their community and their country.”