

THAILAND/MYANMAR BORDER OPERATION

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Ensure the regularisation of the refugee population through a joint registration exercise with the Government of Thailand, enhance the security of camp populations by relocating those camps subject to security risks; and help create and implement mechanisms to determine refugee admission. In Maneelay Burmese Refugee Centre, UNHCR sought to maintain the admission of persons of concern, to strengthen assistance activities particularly for women and children, and to pursue resettlement options for the centre population.



Persons of Concern

HOST COUNTRY/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Thailand (Refugees)	99,720	99,720	-	-

Impact

- In Thailand, admission boards were created in the three border provinces concerned in order to ensure that persons in need of protection were admitted.
- A registration of all camp populations was conducted. This exercise provided essential information about the refugees and their specific needs.
- UNHCR's protection activities and direct assistance complemented NGO programmes for camp-based refugees.
- Security in the refugee camps was improved and their humanitarian and civilian nature reaffirmed. Two camps subject to security risks were relocated further inland.
- Working relationships with the UNHCR office in Yangon were strengthened with the purpose of gaining access to areas of return in Myanmar and preparing for the eventual voluntary repatriation of the refugee population when conditions allow it.

Income and Expenditure (USD)

WORKING BUDGET*	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE*
3,289,479	2,866,552	447,894	3,314,446	3,092,806

* Includes costs at Headquarters.
** Includes opening balance and adjustments.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

The current refugee population along the Thai-Myanmar border consists mainly of persons belonging to the Karen and Karenni ethnic minorities from Myanmar. They sought refuge in Thailand as a result of the ethnic insurgency and human rights abuses associated with civil conflict. These refugees arrived gradually over time, some 10 per cent of them as early as 1984, with the majority arriving after 1994. New arrivals were still being reported on a monthly basis in 1999. The refugees were sheltered in 11 camps at the Thai-Myanmar border.

UNHCR considers these refugees to be *prima facie* refugees, to the extent that they are civilians and non-combatants. Thailand provides temporary sanctuary and has accommodated them in refugee camps spread along a 2,400-kilometre border where they receive basic care and assistance from NGOs, under the auspices of the Royal Thai Government. If found outside the camps, however, the refugees are subject to deportation as illegal immigrants according to Thailand's immigration laws. In addition, some 2,500 Myanmar nationals, mainly ethnic Burmese students and political activists individually recognised as refugees by UNHCR, live in Bangkok and in the Maneeloy Burmese Students Centre (MBSC) in Ratchaburi.

Constraints

Serious protection problems, such as cross-border attacks on refugee camps, started to occur in 1995. In 1999, the Government of Thailand initiated a series of crackdowns on illegal Myanmar migrants living in Bangkok and at the border. Many were arrested and sent to the border for deportation. Despite UNHCR's insistence that refugees and *bona fide* asylum-seekers be excluded from this exercise, some may have been returned against their will.

The above policy towards Myanmar migrants - and the siege at the Myanmar Embassy on 1 October 1999 by a group of political activists - have had a negative impact on the general public's attitude towards Myanmar migrants and refugees. This mood of exasperation, exacerbated by the local media, gave more political weight to those in the Government who advocate greater restrictions on refugees.

Funding

Although the operation was relatively well-funded, 80 per cent of contributions from donor governments were received only after June. This late funding adversely affected UNHCR's operational capacity, particularly at the crucial time of the registration exercise, when staff and resources were urgently needed.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

The year 1999 was the first full year of UNHCR involvement on the Thai-Myanmar border, following the opening of three field offices in late 1998. This allowed UNHCR to initiate a number of protection-related activities in the 11 camps located at the border. As in the past 15 years, humanitarian assistance was provided by international NGOs with the support of the Thai authorities.

In MBSC, which accommodated some 1,000 residents, UNHCR sought to maintain the admission of persons of concern and provide greater assistance to women and vulnerable individuals. As a result of the siege of the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok in October 1999, Myanmar nationals residing in the city were transferred to the MBSC at the request of the Government in order to facilitate their resettlement. UNHCR drew up a policy paper on the harmonisation of practices towards refugees in border camps and urban areas. Its recommendations were shared with the Government and will be pursued in 2000.

In order to promote the equal treatment of all Myanmar asylum-seekers and refugees in Thailand, UNHCR has encouraged Myanmar asylum-seekers in Bangkok to seek UNHCR's protection at the border area instead.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: Counselling and home visits were made in order to improve social conditions at the MBSC. However, social problems persisted in 1999 due to the Centre's increased population. Conflicts between different ethnic groups, quarrels between residents, and incidents of domestic violence required close monitoring and intervention by UNHCR protection staff and social workers.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: Environmental degradation was mitigated through the distribution of cooking fuel to the refugee population in the 11 camps

and to the MBSC residents. Monthly allowances to cover food and accommodation were paid to refugees in Bangkok pending admittance to the MBSC.

Education: MBSC residents benefited from improved primary education, vocational training and recreational activities (mainly for adolescents, a particularly vulnerable category in an environment prone to violence and unrest).

Food: UNHCR provided food to all MBSC residents, as they are not allowed to work outside the camp premises. To reduce the residents' dependency on assistance and the high costs generated by the doubling of the Centre population in the course of the year, the cooked food system was gradually replaced by the distribution of dry food rations for newcomers. A supplementary feeding programme was also implemented for pregnant women, TB and HIV patients, as well as malnourished children.

Forestry: Funds were provided for environmental education in two camps, Ban Don Yang and Nu Po. The courses targeted refugee pupils, but teachers and camp section leaders also benefited and are expected to spread the environmental message throughout the camp community.

Health/Nutrition: General health services were provided to the MBSC residents. An average of 500 patients per month received treatment at the outpatient department. Special attention was provided to vulnerable groups, including TB and HIV patients, malnourished children and pregnant women. Medical cases needing specialised care were referred to the provincial hospital.

Legal Assistance: The registration of all camp populations was carried out jointly by UNHCR and the Government of Thailand between March and May 1999. This provided essential information on the refugee population. Delays in the regular updating of the database (due to lengthy processing) were encountered in two provinces. The Legal Section received additional temporary staff to conduct interviews with asylum-seekers in Bangkok in order to determine their status. A second round of consultations with the Government took place in November 1999. Its purpose was to take stock of UNHCR's activities along the Thai-Myanmar border over the past year and to discuss future collaboration.

Operational Support (to Agencies): Implementing partners working in the MBSC were given operational support for communications, electricity, etc.

Sanitation: With the increase in the refugee population in the MBSC, the sanitation system was upgraded in order to maintain satisfactory hygienic conditions and preserve the environment. This included an expansion of the centre's drainage and sewage system. Rubbish was regularly collected.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: The provincial authorities were helped to improve access roads to several camps. Huay Kalok and Mawker refugee camps had suffered armed attacks in early 1998 and remained at risk of cross-border incursions. The camp population, therefore, was re-located, between September and November 1999, to a new site in Umpium (total relocated population 15,000). UNHCR provided site-planning expertise and contributed to some preparatory infrastructure works. The MBSC was upgraded in November and December. This included the construction of a food distribution centre, a communal kitchen, a resettlement processing and visiting area, accommodation for security guards and the rehabilitation of roads and paths inside the Centre.

Transport/Logistics: Refugees from Myanmar residing in Bangkok or arriving from border camps with valid (protection-related) reasons for not being able to remain at the border, were helped to reach the MBSC. The costs of transportation of dry food rations to the Centre were also covered.

Water: An adequate water supply was provided to ensure that the basic needs of the refugee population were met. Particular attention was paid to the special requirements of children and women.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

As of December 1999, there were a total of four international and 27 national posts at the UNHCR Regional Office in Bangkok and in three field offices along the Thai-Myanmar border: at Kanchanaburi, Mae Sot and Mae Hong Son. As of September 1999, two additional National Officer posts and five General Service posts were approved. An international staff member on mission status was assigned to the MBSC, with the support of a national officer and a driver, as well as a

social counsellor and an assistant resettlement officer seconded under an arrangement with an implementing partner. Following the Government of Thailand's request for a more active role by UNHCR in the resettlement of the Myanmar refugees in Bangkok and in the MBSC, the Protection and Durable Solutions Unit at the Regional Office in Bangkok was reinforced. The Regional Office recruited four consultants in September 1999 to help determine the status of the large number of asylum-seekers in Bangkok.

Co-ordination with the UNHCR office in Yangon was strengthened through several missions to Myanmar by the Regional Representative and the participation of UNHCR Yangon staff in planning and consultations with the Government of Thailand. A long-term objective is to establish a UNHCR presence on the Myanmar side of the border in preparation for an eventual voluntary repatriation operation.

Working with Others

The Regional Office continued to share offices and facilities with other UN agencies at the UN House in Bangkok, making regular contact with sister agencies easier. The Office also participated in various inter-agency fora including the Resident Co-ordinator System, Heads of Agencies meetings, Security Management Team, Steering Committee (Operations Managers/Administrative Officers), etc.

UNHCR participated in the monthly meetings organised by the Committee for Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand, a communication network which co-ordinates NGO activities and represents them to the Government, international organisations and embassies. UNHCR has been providing financial support to this forum for many years and will continue to do so. The Regional Office in Bangkok continued to hold regular information meetings in Bangkok and in the field with NGOs and embassies.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Through registration, promotion of admission procedures and regular visits to the camps, UNHCR continued to ensure the refugees' well-being and that the fundamentals of international protection, particularly the principle of asylum, were respected and implemented. UNHCR co-ordinated with the Government of Thailand and NGOs working in the refugee camps to improve their situation. This resulted in the relo-

cation of camps further away from the border when the refugees' security required it, the improvement of access roads and efforts to mitigate the impact of the refugees' presence on the environment. In the border camps, UNHCR's protection and assistance activities were carried out in close co-ordination with existing NGO programmes. These activities, furthermore, provided essential information for the preparation of long-term strategies, including the refugees' voluntary repatriation when conditions allow it.

UNHCR's strategy for the identification of durable solutions for the Maneelay population and other Myanmar refugees in Bangkok had to be revised due to the restrictive political climate engendered by the Myanmar Embassy siege in the latter part of the year. The Thai Government has nevertheless publicly reiterated its commitment to continue to provide temporary asylum to asylum-seekers from Myanmar.

Offices

Bangkok
Kanchanaburi
Mae Hong Son
Mae Sot

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Interior – Operations Centre for Displaced Persons

NGOs

Burmese Border Consortium (Thai Baptist Missionary Fellowship, Christ Church of Thailand, International Rescue Committee, Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand, ZOA Refugee Care Netherlands)
Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees
Foundation in Support of Refugee Assistance
Programmes in Thailand
International Rescue Committee

Voluntary Contributions (USD)

Donor	Income	Contribution
France	81,436	81,436
Germany	300,000	300,000
Japan	900,000	900,000
New Zealand	80,175	80,175
Sweden	330,253	330,253
Switzerland	324,675	324,675
United States of America	850,000	850,000
Private Donors Thailand	13	13
TOTAL	2,866,552	2,866,552

Financial Report (USD)

Programme Overview	Current Year's Projects		Prior Years' Projects	
		notes		notes
Opening Balance	383,829	(1)		
Income from Contributions	2,866,552			
Other Funds Available	64,065	(1)		
Total Funds Available	3,314,446	(5)		
Expenditure	3,092,806	(1) (5)		
Closing Balance	221,640	(1) (5)		
Expenditure Breakdown				
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination*	909,430		122,671	
Community Services	14,327		0	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	833,107		0	
Education	17,361		0	
Food	166,583		0	
Forestry	1,461		0	
Health / Nutrition	100,964		0	
Legal Assistance	262,184		0	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	32,046		0	
Sanitation	21,074		0	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	183,285		0	
Transport / Logistics	7,755		0	
Water	4,035		0	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	179,618		0	
Combined projects	(223,800)		0	
Sub-Total Operational	2,509,430		122,671	
Administrative Support*	251,901		0	
Sub-Total Disbursements/Deliveries	2,761,331	(5)	122,671	(6)
Unliquidated Obligations	331,475	(5)	0	(6)
TOTAL	3,092,806	(1) (5)	122,671	
Instalments with Implementing Partners				
Payments Made	516,920		0	
Reporting Received	337,302		0	
Balance	179,618		0	
Outstanding 1 January	0		0	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		0	
Currency Adjustment	0		0	
Outstanding 31 December	179,618		0	
Unliquidated Obligations				
Outstanding 1 January	0		186,735	(6)
New Obligations	3,092,806	(1) (5)	0	
Disbursements	2,761,331	(5)	122,671	(6)
Cancellations	0		64,064	(6)
Outstanding 31 December	331,475	(5)	0	(6)

* Includes costs at Headquarters
 Figures which cross reference to accounts
 (1) Annex 1 to Statement 1
 (5) Schedule 5
 (6) Schedule 6