



Burma's embassy in Thailand has begun issuing temporary passports to migrants fleeing extensive flooding as reports continue to surface of Thai police arresting thousands as they try to cross back into Burma.

Embassy officials have been visiting the flood shelter in at Wat Rai Khing Wittaya monastery in Nakhon Pathom province, where hundreds of Burmese whose legal documents were lost to the floods have been in hiding. Many of these have also lost contact with their employers who hold details on the status of their presence in Thailand.

Thet Khine, who is staying at the monastery, said the officials were "issuing 500 passports for 500 Burmese migrants. Apparently they negotiated with the Thai labour ministry regarding our work permits and it has been sorted."

Thailand has come under heavy criticism for its treatment of migrant flood victims. Under Thai law migrant workers are normally prohibited from leaving their zones of registration, meaning that thousands have either opted to stay in flood-stricken areas or otherwise face arrest.

Reports earlier this week claimed that up to 1,000 Burmese had been detained in the border town of Mae Sot, and were [struggling to access food and water](#) .

Burmese authorities yesterday responded to the growing mass of migrants arriving in Mae Sot by temporarily opening the bridge connecting the town to Myawaddy on the Burmese side of the border, which has been closed since July last year.

A *DVB* reporter in Mae Sot said however that Thai officials had only allowed 100 or so to cross over the bridge. When asked why they were holding the remaining, Thailand reportedly said that it was waiting to see whether Burmese authorities would arrest those returning via the bridge, many of whom would have left Burma illegally to work in Thailand.

But the real reason may be more sinister: Thai police along the border are believed to be in cahoots with a number of Burmese militias, and may be receiving kick-backs from the hundreds of Burmese that are deported through an unofficial checkpoint run by a Burmese government-aligned Border Guard Force, which is charging 2,500THB per person for entry.

Myawaddy police commander Myo Swe has questioned Thai authorities about reports of their role in the extortion of returning migrants.

“Thai immigration replied that they were only testing with the 100 [that crossed over the bridge] and that they will stop sending them through Border Guard Force checkpoints if the Burmese authorities lodge an official complaint,” said the *DVB* reporter.

Burmese Deputy Labour Minister Myint Thein told *DVB* last month that Naypyidaw would [drastically increase assistance](#) to Burmese migrant workers abroad after decades of neglect.

The confirmed death toll from Thailand’s worst floods in 70 years floods now stands at more than 380. Millions continue to flee Bangkok and surrounding provinces, with floodwaters having submerged an area the size of Kuwait and destroyed nearly a quarter of Thailand’s rice crop. The Bangkok Metropolitan Authority says the amount of rainfall this year has been 40 percent higher than average.

Around three million Burmese live in Thailand, many of whom struggle with healthcare and legal assistance. The Burmese embassy is set to embark on a project to help the majority with official registration.

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