



NAKHOM PATHOM, THAILAND —Thailand's government announced on Friday afternoon that almost 500 mostly Burmese migrant workers will be evacuated to Ratchaburi, west of the capital of Bangkok, tomorrow morning.

“The floods are less than two kilometers away, so we have to move the group tomorrow, starting at 9am,” announced an official from the Thailand Labor Ministry, who gave his name as Kobchai, at the Rai Khing temple in Nakhon Pathom, close to the flooded western side of Bangkok.

“By tomorrow afternoon we anticipate that Wat Rai Khing will be flooded,” said Kobchai.

Around 60 of the migrants, who have fled rising floodwaters in central plains areas of Thailand and northern Bangkok suburbs, will return to Burma via Mae Sot, also tomorrow.

The shelter, by Friday accessible only by a two and one-half hour drive around Samut Sakhon from central Bangkok, has been the sole sanctuary for the estimated 200,000-400,000 Burmese migrants affected by the floodwaters.

On Friday afternoon at the shelter—set up by the Thai government amid numerous allegations that some migrant workers elsewhere are being exploited by a cabal of Burmese brokers and militia groups working with Thai police and immigration officials—a group of ninety Burmese migrants queued for wages and documents withheld by various employers in flooded Ayutthaya.

A Thai NGO worker at the complex, asking not to be named, said that she referred the cases to Thai government officials, who in turn sought the co-operation of the employers.

“The government worked on our behalf, as the employers would never pay any attention to me,” she said.

Among the group at the shelter are many with the all-too-familiar tales of trafficking and exploitation that have become synonymous with Burmese migrant worker life in Thailand.

Part of the almost 500 migrants who are soon to be moved away from the floods, which still threaten more areas of inner Bangkok as the edge slowly southward, was Zin Lat Soe, a 28-year-old Burmese who arrived in Thailand just one month ago.

After having his leg crushed by a heavy iron chain at the factory where he worked in Ayutthaya, his boss took him to Thammasat University Hospital.

“I did not know how to use the chain. I did not get any training, and do not speak any Thai,” said Zin Lat Soe.

He says his boss left him at the hospital without any means to pay for the treatment he needed.

“Thammasat University Hospital gave 100,000 baht worth of free treatment for him, and then referred his case to us,” said a representative of Living Water Center, an NGO based in flooded Pathum Thani that works to support Burmese migrants.

“We are very grateful for the hospital's kindness, as they have flood troubles of their own as well,” said the NGO staffer.

Now with steel supports protruding from his shin, which is still a melange of sores and fist-sized bruises, he is on crutches, but smiling as he makes his way around Wat Rai Khing

“They have looked after me well here,” he said. “I hope it is the same in Ratchaburi.”

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