

ALOHA from Burma (Myanmar)

Dear Friends,

Junior BARS (Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies) students traveled to several different states throughout the country as part of their fulfillment for the 2-hour community service credits. They spent from three to four weeks in an area and worked with the locals in many fields such as religious education, learning local cultures and languages, helping at schools for mentally- or physically-challenged children. They are learning how blessed they are compared to some unfortunate children.

Since BARS is having a two-month vacation starting from March till the end of April, I have been doing quite a bit of traveling. I am trying to be observant of ordinary people and their lives around me during my trips. Mudon is a small town south of Moulmein (Moulmein is a city where an American Baptist Mission hospital used to be.) It was very depressing to be in Mudon seeing economically helpless people and knowing that I can't help them. Many people who are economically doing fine are those who work in Thailand, Malaysia or Singapore illegally. Our town, Mudon, is very close to the Thailand border and it is very convenient to go to Malaysia and Penang by motorboat. I will write more about my trip and my town later if I have time. Being back in Rangoon (Yangon), I have been very busy lately teaching a youth class at the Summer Bible School from Mon Baptist Church and computer classes at Nant Tha Gone Karen Baptist Church.

According to my observation so far, it is sad that our country is facing the most serious brain drain ever in history. Educated people feel no hope and freedom being in this country and only those who have no way of going out and those who came back from abroad remains here.

These are the social stratifications as I have seen so far.

- 1) Working-class families who make about Kyats. 1,500 (\$ 1.5) a day (lives from pay-check to pay-check). The cost of living is quite a burden for these people.
- 2) Middle-class families who own shops or small businesses. The cost of living is about the same as or a little bit below their income. Even if their income is above the cost of living, the inflation is killing them.
- 3) Educated people whose income is in Kyats. They are also struggling but they are similar to category 2.
- 4) Families whose income is in U.S. Dollars. The cost of living is not a burden for them. They can live decently.
- 5) People who are getting foreign aid. For example, one of their relatives works in a foreign country. They can live decently.
- 6) People who are in power.
- 7) People who are extremely rich with their inheritance. They usually own companies.

In conclusion, we have been blessed in many different ways and we are grateful to know that God has been watching and protecting us. My prayers are with my friends in the States as we are all going through the emotional distress of Iraqi war.

Love in Christ,

Lwin Moe

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