

Shattered

..... houses, dreams, lives, education, livestock, harvest, livelihood, future



At the Shwedagon Pagoda

What remains when everything is destroyed?
What refuge is there?

For the safety of all involved in this update I will not disclose names and locations in most of the cases. I have had to be very careful in choosing my words, and in some places you will need to read between the lines.

After three years I could finally return to Myanmar. I was looking forward to see my teachers and friends and at the same time wondering what it would be like to be in the country. Joy and sadness, happy encounters and hearing painful stories, laughter and shedding tears have accompanied me during the seven weeks I was there. Due to the present situation, I have mostly stayed in the meditation centre, first in Yangon and then in the one near Pyin Oo Lwin.

Our yearly visit to a nearby village was always such a joyful event as described in the previous updates. However, this year it is an altogether different story a very sad and distressing one.

Two thirds of its houses have been destroyed a little while ago and the villagers had to flee. Some people had left the village already some months ago when the situation in the area was deteriorating.

The homeless villagers found shelter in the monasteries and meditation centres established by monks from that village. In the absence of social institutions as we have them in the West, the monasteries and nunneries step in to care for these people and provide them a safe and protected refuge as well as offering them food and Dhamma teachings.

MIA has offered support to these 'refugees' by making donations to the two centres, one in Yangon and one near Pyin Oo Lwin. The centres offer them a safe place to stay and provide them with food.

In addition, we have also supported a number of individual people and some families who have lost their house.



The representatives of seven families who lost their home



At the 'village square' in the centre - Cooking over the open fire





We also heard about a monastery in Upper Burma that has taken in refugees ten months ago when their village had been destroyed. The Sayadaw is offering them a safe and protected place to stay. For four months he also had offered them food. But lacking the means to do so, he stopped providing them meals. Since then, the refugees need to go out and work, seizing whatever opportunity arises to earn some money. MIA has offered support to each of these persons (roughly one hundred persons) to ease their difficult living situation.



Families living on a few square meters, their few belongings in bags



Offering to a mother and her kid

About 50 refugees live in this room



What people told me:

“After running away from the village, we had to spend three days and nights in the forest. We did not have anything to eat. At night it was cold, we had no blankets to cover ourselves.”



“A villager went out to the field with his bullock cart. Suddenly, the two cows pulling the cart were blown up by a xxxxx, severing the heads from the body.”

“I buried the valuables and money of the family in the earth because it would have been too risky to take them with me. One never knows what they will do with you at check-points.”

“The family down the road took shelter in the hole they dug under their house [the houses are usually built off the ground]. When their house caught fire, they noticed it too late and could not escape. Their dead bodies were found later, the mother holding her baby in her lap and breast-feeding.”

“When a family had left the village earlier on, their house and belongings were no longer secure.”

“Now I have new clothes [donated by local people near the centre] and a new life.”

“We had to carry the [handicapped] kid until we were in safety.”

“When things started to deteriorate, I brought my cows to a neighbouring village and told my friend to take care of them. I do not know, if the cows are still alive.”



“We could not leave the village without getting permission from the guys, and we needed to be back in the village by evening. For medical issues we needed to get a special permission to leave the village and go to the nearest hospital.”



The dining hall in the centre

On a happier note:

One family who had to flee the village has a handicapped kid. The boy is seven years old and is mentally and physically handicapped since birth: he cannot walk and speak, he has to be fed soft food because he cannot chew but only swallow. The parents must carry him around wherever they go, and one person needs to be with the kid all the time. Another blow hit that family when the father had a motorcycle accident recently in which he lost one eye.

We reckoned that a **wheelchair** would make a big difference in the life of this family. When we looked for the family, we found the father carrying his son and looking after him. The mother was in the hall to participate in the daily evening chanting.



I had wondered if that child who had been carried around all his life long would be afraid of sitting alone on this funny chair. Or would he enjoy it? The father was so happy to see the wheelchair and sat his son on the seat. And – to my big surprise! – the kid enjoyed sitting on the wheelchair by making happy sounds, when he was pushed around in the compound.

We met Sayadaw standing in front of the hall who then inspected the wheelchair, and other people started to gather to have a look. Then I noticed that the mother came out of the hall [somebody must have informed her to come out].

When she saw her son sitting on a wheelchair, her face showed this beautiful expression of surprise and amazement. It was as if saying to herself, “*Is this true? Is what I see correct?*”

This sight touched me to tears and I was so grateful that we – MIA, that is: YOU supporting our projects – could make this offering.

The mother joined the group and marvelled at the wheelchair and her son.

In the days to come, I had so many ‘happiness-attacks’ whenever I saw somebody pushing the kid on the wheelchair through the centre. Sometimes it was the parents, sometimes it was another kid or an elderly woman.



Another benefit of having the wheelchair is the fact that the kid can

be part of the community. One morning I saw him in his wheelchair in the open area next to the kitchen where women, including his mom, were cutting vegetables. He was no longer tucked away somewhere but he was in the middle of social activities. Some other kids were pushing him here and there while the mother could do her work.

In these dire times, it was especially nice to be able to support so many people. Without your on-going generous support, this would not have been possible. Please know that we honour each of your donation, big or small, and your trust in our work and projects.

We have received countless ‘Thank you’ and seen peoples’ face light up with happiness and gratitude – this gratitude and happiness is equally meant for YOU!

With a deep bow and many blessings
Ariya



Shwedagon Pagoda

May there be peace on earth and goodwill for all beings.

May love, kindness and compassion be a support to all.

May the wishes of all beings for happiness and well-being be fulfilled.