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Brief
On
Ban Vinai Refugee Camp

1. Background

Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in Pak Chom District, Loei Province, was opened in 1975 with the camp population of 12,000. As of today, the population stands at 45,000. This is the most populous UNHCR involved refugee camp in the East and the South-East Asia.

Following the Royal Thai Government's policy of camp consolidation, a total of some 9,000 hilltribe refugees were transferred from Ban Nam Yao, Nan Province, to Ban Vinai during the period of May 1983 - May 1984.

Since Ban Vinai camp was closed to all new arrivals as from April 1984, such people as "Mekong River crossers" have, upon determination of refugee status by the authorities, been transferred to Chiang Kham camp for hilltribes and to Na Phio camp for Low Land Laos instead of being accommodated at Ban Vinai.

In Ban Vinai there are ten ethnic groups, namely, Hmong, Htin, Yao, Leu, Khamu, Laotheng, Thaidam, Musor, Haw and Low Land Lao, Hmong out of which is the ruling majority (95% of the total population). Almost all refugees have their "home of origin" in Xieng Khouang province, whereas Ban Nam Yao group in Sayaburi province. The professional back-ground of both groups (Xieng Khouang and Ban Nam Yao) is also different. The former were military servicemen, the latter being farmers.

2. Topography and Climate

Ban Vinai refugee camp is situated in a valley which is 1000 pias (400 acres) with an elevation as high 221 metres above sea level. The climate is hot between March and May and cold between October and February. The temperature reaches 45 degrees during the hot season and drops down to 0 degree during the cold season. There is usually heavy rain during the rainy season (June-September.)



3. Camp Population

Year	Births	Birth Rate %	Deaths	Death Rate %	Total
1975	-	-	-	-	12,000
1976	484	87	3,41	0.75	11,657
1977	516	104	3,28	0.83	12,571
1978	475	94	3,38	0.83	11,285
1979	1376	280	3,50	0.89	31,328
1980	907	134	2,58	0,54	30,104
1981	1364	134	3,79	0.43	30,989
1982	1855	158	5,04	0.74	33,362
1983	1940	113	4,82	0.30	37,934
1984	2470	212	5,50	0.47	44,902
1985 (March)	642	73	5,68	0,65	45,231

4. Administration

4.1 The MOI administrative committee at the Provincial level consists of the Governor, who is the chairman, and 13 other members. The camp commander is one of the committee members and also acts as the secretary to the committee. The committee's meetings are regularly held in the camp. A total of three commanders have been serving the camp since 1975.

4.2 The MOI Ban Vinai Office

The office is divided into 11 sections, including administration, registration and ID cards, control and transportation, education, social welfare and skills training etc. The camp commander is the administrative head and the MOI representative in the camp.

4.3 The Refugee Committee

The camp is divided into 9 centres, which are further divided into 33 quarters, 395 buildings and 3,950 rooms. In addition, there are some 2,000 houses constructed by refugees themselves. Each centre, quarter and building has its own chief. The centre chiefs elect a chairman and three vice chairmen for the Refugee Committee. The chairman represents the whole camp population and administers the Committee. The three vice chairmen share the responsibilities for internal security, external affairs and administration.



4.4 The UNHCR Ban Vinai .

The UNHCR proceeded with assistance activities in Ban Vinai in 1975. As of today, the UNHCR office in Ban Vinai is composed of 11 staff members headed by a Field Officer who is the fifth UNHCR officer responsible for Ban Vinai since 1975. Under his supervision, seven staff members are working for the Durable Solutions Team. The main function of the team is to assist refugees in finding a permanent solution for their future, either resettlement to a third country or repatriation to their home country. They are up-dating bio-data records of all refugee families, submitting cases of resettlement or repatriation to UNHCR Bangkok office, helping delegations of resettlement countries process candidates for resettlement, disseminating information relevant to the durable solutions, providing needy refugees with counselling services through home visits, and responsible for inter-camp and medical emergency transfers. Three other staff members assume important responsibilities for Assistance and Protection. They are closely monitoring the UNHCR-funded projects such as provision of food/household items, site maintenance, construction, supplementary feeding, ambulance services, education, medical supplies. In relation to the programmes implemented by the voluntary agencies, the UNHCR is playing a role of the co-ordinating agency. With regard to Protection, the UNHCR has close contact with the Thai local authorities including the Camp Commander's Office for solving problems of new arrivals, criminal cases and internal security problems.

5. Relief services

5.1 Food distribution

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) procures food with funds made available under the Agreement with the UNHCR. The basic ration is as follows:

Rice	500 gms per day for adults 250 gms per day for children under 9 y
Fish	1200 gms per month if fresh or 1320 gms per month if frozen or 750 gms per month if dried



Meat	750 gms per month lean or 900 gms per month if with bones etc.
Vegetables	1.5 kgs per month
Fish sauce	54Q CC per month for adults 180 CC per month for children
Chili peppers	20 gms per month
Salt	50 gms per month
Oil	30 gms per month
Fuel	7 kgs of artificial fuel (compressed sawdust or rice husks) per month per person.

5.2 Housing

The refugee houses are maintained, repaired or reconstructed under the UNHCR - MOI Agreement.

5.3 Public Health and Medical care

The camp has 1 hospital, 2 OPDs and 5 Public Health centres constructed with UNHCR funds. Doctors and nurses are available 24 hours a day to give medical care to sick refugees as well as Thai residents in near-by villages.

5.4 Education

Educational Services are available at three levels.

5.4.1 1 Kindergarten (6 classrooms)

There are some 300 children who are enjoying the classes with 10 teachers.

5.4.2 20 primary school buildings (110 classrooms)

Some 8,000 pupils are being taught by some 300 teachers.

5.4.3 3 adult literacy and vocational training buildings (10 classrooms)

Some 7,500 students/trainees are the beneficiaries of the programmes staffed by some 200 teachers.

All school buildings are expected to be renovated during this year.



5.5 Vulnerable Groups

Vulnerable groups such as mentally/physically handicapped refugees, malnourished children and lactating/pregnant women are enjoying the services rendered by the specialized agencies. An opium detoxification programme was temporarily launched by two voluntary agencies pending a finalization of a programme to be agreed upon between MOI and the UNHCR.

5.6 Camp Security

The internal Security in the camp is secured by the Camp Commander's office (15 policemen and 70 MOI security guards). The Refugee Committee has its own security team which assists the Camp Commander's office in maintaining the camp in good order. The UNHCR has a fire-fighting brigade and a security unit composed of 249 and 223 refugee volunteers respectively. They are trained on a regular basis in co-operation with the Camp Commander's office and are on standby for any emergency situation.

6. The following is a list of the voluntary agencies working in Ban Vinai and their activities,

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| 1. CAMA | : New arrivals relief
Handicrafts, Model house
Hmong literacy, Library
Opium detoxication (rehabilitation) |
| 2. CCT | : Emergency relief |
| 3. COERR | : Rehabilitation of leprosy cases
Rehabilitation (mental/physical handicap cases)
Primary education
Adult Education
Teacher training programme
Para-social services
Vocational training (Sewing)
Nongdeang Agriculture project |
| 4. ESF | : Adult literacy (Hmong and Lao)
Women's programme, Pre-school programme |



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| 5. | FHI | : Hospital feeding
Supplementary feeding
Nutrition education |
| 6. | ICA | : Emergency relief
Kindergarten
Vocational training (barbering)
Distribution of Soya bean milk and gift boxes |
| 7. | IRC | : Site maintenance/Garbage/sewage
Sanitation, Water, Vector control
Sanitation education |
| 8. | JSRC | : Printing, teaching aid production |
| 9. | JVA | : Interview refugees for resettlement in USA |
| 10. | OHI | : Rehabilitation |
| 11. | PPAT | : Family planning |
| 12. | SAO | : Adult literacy |
| 13. | ZOA | : Hospital
Public Health
Opium detoxication (treatment) |

7. Durable Solutions

All refugees in Ban Vinal are granted a temporary asylum by the Royal Thai Government pending a permanent solution on their future life. Most of them have been in the camp for several years.

There are, in general, three kinds of durable solutions for refugees, resettlement to a third country, voluntary repatriation and local settlement, the former two solutions being currently applied to Thailand.

Since 1975 to date, a total of 37,936 persons (905 in 1983 and 1,575 in 1984) have left for a resettlement mainly to the United States, while 127 (10 in 1983 and 1 in 1984) have gone back to their home villages in Laos.

Such slow tendency in making a decision on their future seems to be due to:



- a) The majority of the refugees express a desire to return to Laos subject to certain conditions such as withdrawal of the foreign military forces from Laos, and the Laotian Government's guarantee to returnees for their safe return and re-integration in the society;
- b) Letters received from friends and relatives who have resettled in third countries often point out the difficulties in adapting themselves to a new western society and securing employment. Such information has discouraged refugees in the camp from applying for resettlement.

8. Characteristics

8.1 High Birthrate

During the past 7 years, the Ban Vinal Birthrate in camp has been extremely high in comparison with the Thai national average of 1.6%.

The 1984 average birth rate for the total camp population was 5.5%. In 1983, CCT and PPAT established a family planning project to promote knowledge and acceptance of the birth control in the refugee community. At present there are some 2,000 participants in the programme.

8.2 Sneak-in and Sneak-out cases

It seems that some 3,000 Hmong people have crossed the Mekong River and sneaked in the camp for the purpose of joining their families or relatives. This group of people is called "unauthorized refugees", and not entitled to receiving basic food rations. The UNHCR is, however, registering these people.

On the other hand, it would appear that some 2,000 "authorized refugees" have sneaked out of the camp without MOI's permission in order to find a job mainly in Phetchabun Province where there is a large Thai Hmong Community.



8.3 Difficulties in durable solutions

As mentioned in Paragraph 7 above, Ban Vinai would be one of the most difficult camps in Thailand in terms of durable solutions. It seems to be very hard to break through "Yes to a permanent solution, but not now" attitude of refugees.

UNHCR Ban Vinai

1 April 1985