

The BURMA DAILY

Volume 2 Issue 91

Monday, September 21, 2009

Briefing

In Face of Deficit, Manila Ponders Text Message Tax

LONDON - Alistair Darling could take a tip from his counterparts in the Philippines as he searches for money-saving ideas this weekend: a tax on text messages. The parliament in Manila is planning to implement an excise tax on text messages in a desperate attempt to narrow the country's budget deficit this year. A bill in the house of representatives is seeking a tax of five centavos (\$0.001) on every message sent by a mobile phone. With the Philippines regarded as the world's text-messaging capital, it could raise between \$590 million and \$1 billion in revenue. According to official statistics, the country's 70 million mobile-phone users send an average of 10 to 12 text messages a day. The government says it will only support the tax if it does not affect consumers. However, the three major telecommunication companies in the Philippines, which are protesting against the proposed measure, said the move would hit users because offers such as unlimited texting would no longer be viable. "The proposed tax on SMS is clearly anti-poor and anti-consumer," said Ray Espinosa, head of the regulatory affairs and policy office at Philippine Long Distance Telephone, adding that 92 percent of its SMS traffic was generated from cut-price plans. Falling tax revenues meant the Philippines had less room for manoeuvre to meet its fiscal deficit target of \$5.2 billion, finance secretary Margarito Teves said in London at the weekend. (*Observer*)

Thai King Gets Second Check-Up in Four Days

BANGKOK - Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the world's longest-reigning monarch, underwent his second medical check-up in four days at Bangkok's Siriraj Hospital, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said on Sunday. "There is no problem with His Majesty's condition. From my chats with doctors, there is nothing to be concerned about. The medical panel will issue a statement this evening," Abhisit told reporters after signing a visitors log book at the hospital. The Royal Household Bureau issued no public announcement on the king's first hospital visit last Wednesday, describing the check-up as routine. (*Reuters*)



Reuters

Exiled former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra gives a live address via tele-conference to supporters during a rally at the Royal Plaza in Bangkok Saturday. Thousands of supporters of exiled former Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra braved torrential rain and flooding on Saturday in a rally to mark the third anniversary of the billionaire's overthrow by the military.

Communism and Capitalism Are Mixing in Laos

BY THOMAS FULLER
INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

VIENTIANE - Hammer-and-sickle flags flutter above government offices in downtown Vientiane, and the entrance to the national museum is decorated with massive sculptures glorifying the workers' revolutionary struggle.

Officially, this sparsely populated country is still communist. But these days, that really depends on whom you ask.

Three months ago US President Barack Obama declared that Laos, the country the US tried so hard to prevent from toppling toward communism during the Vietnam War, had "ceased to be a Marxist-Leninist country."

Following similar announcements in past decades for China and Vietnam, the White House made the declaration without fanfare in a June 12 memorandum that lifts a ban on Laotian companies from getting financing from the US Export-Import Bank.

But in Vientiane, news of the US policy change was perplexing for Klongmanee Boonliang, a saleswoman in a government-run bookshop where Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin are still best sellers.

Every month, schools and offices buy 400 to 500 poster-size

portraits of the two men and hang them in prominent places. "The Smile of Lenin," one of several booklets praising Lenin on the shelves, also sells well.

"He was a brave and smart person," she said, offering an impromptu homily to the founder of Soviet communism. "Everyone wants to get lessons from him. It's still important."

What to make of Laos, the former French colony that became a focal point of great powers during the Vietnam War, only to slide back into obscurity once the Cold War ended?

Landlocked and mountainous, Laos has long had a reputation as more somnolent than its hard-charging neighbors. Today, however, Vientiane's streets are filled with the hallmarks of conspicuous consumption - Hummers, Mercedes and other fancy cars. Purse snatchings are on the rise, a sign perhaps that people have more to steal. In a center-city gym, a group of high school girls spend their evenings practicing dance moves that might make teenagers in Los Angeles blush, let alone the ashen-faced members of the Lao Politburo.

Capitalism is making inroads in Laos, but mastering the ideology

might require some re-education. The country is scheduled to open its first stock exchange next year, a plan that prompted a local newspaper to run a series of articles offering a glossary of capitalist terms ("A stock market itself is like any other market," said a recent explanatory article. "Everything has a price.")

The official line from the government is that Laos is a one-party democracy-only members of the Communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party are allowed to contest elections.

"Marxist-Leninist theory is practical and is suitable for the current situation in Laos," President Choummaly Sayasone said in a speech to military veterans earlier this year that was reported in the English-language Vientiane Times.

Yet even some government offices are enthusiastically entrepreneurial. Provincial authorities have encouraged the construction of lucrative casinos that cater to Chinese and Thai gamblers (Lao citizens are not allowed). And in Vientiane, the Foreign Ministry charges 1 million kip, about \$120, as a "registration fee" for visiting journalists and \$24 for every day in the country-princely sums for this impoverished country.

REGIONAL

US Charges Dropped Against Exiled Hmong Leader Vang Pao

BY ERIC BAILEY
AND MY-THUAN TRAN
LOS ANGELES TIMES

SACRAMENTO, California - US Federal prosecutors dropped charges Friday against Vang Pao, the exiled Hmong general accused two years ago of plotting with a band of aging Central Valley expatriates to overthrow the communist regime in their homeland of Laos.

Vang Pao, 79, had been singled out as the alleged ringleader of the bizarre scheme to launch a coup—reputedly with mercenaries armed with AK-47 assault rifles and Stinger missiles—in the summer of 2007.

Although prosecutors filed motions abandoning charges against the general, one of the US' staunchest allies during the Vietnam War, they maintained the counts against a dozen of his alleged comrades and added new ones. US Attorney Lawrence Brown of Sacramento offered no explanation for why the charges were dropped against Vang Pao but not the others, who face the possibility of life in prison. But he said federal prosecutors have discretion to consider a person's culpability and history as well as the consequences of a conviction.

At Vang Pao's Westminster

home, the phone rang off the hook with calls from Hmong supporters.

"We've been getting so many calls we don't even have time to ask who they are," said Chi Vang, 24, the general's youngest son. "His supporters can't wait to see him to celebrate this momentous occasion."

Chi Vang said the news was a "huge sigh of relief" for the family. "We have been waiting for this moment for two years."

Vang Pao's arrest in June 2007 prompted outrage among Hmong who fled to the US in the final days of the Vietnam War. With Vang Pao as their commander in chief, Hmong guerrillas trained by the CIA helped the US battle the North Vietnamese for more than a dozen years before the war's end.

To many Hmong, the prosecution seemed yet another betrayal by the US. Though more than 100,000 Hmong resettled in the US, thousands remain trapped in refugee camps or highland jungles, still on the run from communist forces.

In Hmong enclaves from Fresno to Saint Paul, Minnesota, the general's supporters expressed joy for a man many venerated.

At KBIF-AM (900), which markets itself to the sizable Hmong

community in Fresno, dozens of callers were happy about the news, said Maya Xiong, Hmong news director of the small station. Some talked of performing traditional Hmong rituals to thank their ancestors for the dropped charges.

"Everyone sees him as a grandfather or father figure," Xiong said. "Whatever happens to him, we feel like it's happening to a member of our family. We feel we have to stick up for him."

Hmong and US veterans who fought alongside Vang Pao also celebrated.

"We have been praying for this," said Colonel Wangyee Vang, president of Hmong Veterans of America.

"It's great news," said Karl Polifka, a retired Air Force colonel who knew Vang Pao during the war. "It's just unfortunate they don't forget about the whole thing. The whole case is flaky."

Attorneys for several of the other defendants expressed hope that the government would eventually drop the remaining charges.

"This is like dismissing charges against George Washington, but the rest of his troops are told they still have to stand trial," said Mark Reichel, a Sacramento defense attorney.

Prosecutors said the ongoing investigation had unearthed new details with the translation of "voluminous" foreign language conversations from wiretaps and undercover recordings, as well as the review of 30,000 documents seized at the time of the arrests.

The government made its initial case against Vang Pao and 10 of his compatriots based mostly on the work of an undercover agent with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Harrison Jack, a Vietnam vet and former California National Guard officer who told friends he owed his life to the Hmong, had begun negotiating in January 2007 to purchase assault rifles from the federal agent, who posed as a black-market weapons broker. By the time of the arrests five months later, the discussions had turned to an outright coup d'état and a \$9.8-million weapons purchase.

An 18-page draft of the plot, dubbed Operation Popcorn, reads like the outline of an over-the-top spy novel: A group of aging Hmong seek to amass an arsenal of AK-47s, Stinger missiles and explosives, hire special-op mercenaries and reduce government buildings in the Laotian capital city, Vientiane, to rubble.

Noordin Top, A Terrorist Mastermind Whose Luck Ran Out

BY SETH MYDANS
THE NEW YORK TIMES

BANGKOK - Over the past six years, Noordin Muhammad Top, considered to be one of the most violent Islamist militants in the region, had become an almost mythical figure among both those who sheltered him on the run and those who pursued him and finally killed him in Indonesia on Thursday.

While suspected of orchestrating the country's main bombing attacks during those years, he repeatedly slipped away from capture, most recently in August when, after an all-night raid on a safe house, the police discovered they had killed the wrong man.

At a news conference on Thursday, the chief of the National Police, Bambang Hendarso Danuri, held up photographs of fingerprints that he said confirmed that this time, the man they had killed was Noordin.

Journalists joined the police in raising a cheer.

As the region's main Islamist group, Jemaah Islamiyah, turned away from large-scale violence in recent years, and as its leading figures were killed or captured

one after another, Noordin, 41, became the most wanted terrorism suspect and a symbol of violent jihad.

He made a name for himself as the most skilled, inventive and dangerous bomb maker in the country, and was suspected of planning bomb attacks on the JW Marriott hotel in Jakarta in 2003, on the Australian embassy in Jakarta in 2004, in Bali in 2005 and at the JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta in July.

People who knew him and people who have studied his activities said Thursday that Noordin had a quiet magnetism that drew sympathizers to protect him, new recruits to join his splinter group and at least three women to marry and start families with him, giving him both cover and shelter.

"He was a quiet person, didn't talk much, very pious," said an Islamic clergyman, Abu Wildan, who knew him between 1993 and 2002 when he was a student and then the headmaster at Lukmanul Hakiem, an Islamic boarding school in Malaysia, where he was born.

"He prayed five times a day and was keen to look after and defend the Muslims' rights," Wildan said in a telephone interview. Noordin, who graduated from the University of Technology in Malaysia in 1991, taught computers, sociology and the Malay language at the boarding school, he said.

Noordin was also a networker, Wildan said, visiting friends who were sick and consulting with fellow teachers before making decisions at the boarding school.

The school preached the violent brand of jihad of Abu Bakar Bashir, the godfather of Jemaah Islamiyah, and Noordin embraced its radical version of Islam.

Like many other militants, he fled to Indonesia to evade a Malaysian crackdown on militants that followed the terrorist attacks in the US on Sept 11, 2001.

By this time he seemed to have matured into a more focused and ambitious man, according to Nasir Abas, a former Islamist leader who defected to the government in 2003 and who was for a time Noordin's commander.

"He is very well-organized," Abas said in a telephone inter-

view. "He is very charismatic. He is articulate, he is very good in influencing people to join his cause, giving encouragement and motivation.

"That's why he was good in recruiting his followers."

But it was luck and circumstance that turned him into a leader, said Sidney Jones, an expert on terrorism with the International Crisis Group.

He did not set out to become a bomb maker but began working with explosives when another militant, who had been hiding them, said he no longer wanted to keep them, Ms. Jones said, speaking by telephone from Jakarta.

"It was only when he was forced into a decision about having explosives that he became a leader and turned into a bomb maker," she said.

"And from that time on his status grew within the radical fringe of the extremist network," she said. "It continued to grow with each act and with his ability to elude the police. And so it was largely through flukes and an astonishing run of good luck, rather than skill on his part."

INTERNATIONAL

— International Briefs —

China Seeks More Transparency in Anti-Graft Drive

BEIJING - China's Communist party wants more transparency from government officials in disclosing their assets, including overseas property and investments made by family members, the official Xinhua news agency said. The stricter rules will require officials to submit reports to the government, detailing their property and investment activity, including the overseas business dealings of spouses and children, according to the party's anti-corruption body. Beijing fears official malfeasance is undermining its authority to govern and sparking violent protests against corrupt officials. According to Ministry of Commerce statistics, about 4,000 corrupt officials have ferreted about \$50 billion out of the country since the beginning of economic reforms in 1978 through to 2003. The party's annual plenary session ended on Friday, focusing on corruption, political stagnation and ethnic tensions—problems which it said “seriously damaged the party's flesh-and-blood bond with the people and seriously affected the solidity of the party's ruling status.” (Reuters)

Captured Pakistani Taliban Militant Dies of Wounds

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - A captured Pakistani Taliban commander, who was accused of killing captured members of the security forces and rivals in Pakistan's northwestern Swat Valley, died in the hospital on Sunday, the military said. Security forces captured Sher Mohammad Kasab in a raid near Swat's main town, Mingora, on Wednesday. The militant was wounded while his three sons were killed in an exchange of fire. “He was severely wounded. We tried to save his life, but he succumbed to his wounds early this morning,” said a military spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Akhtar Abbas. Another military official in the region said the death of Kasab, who carried bounty of \$120,000 on his head, would reassure residents of the former tourist valley that the Taliban was finished. Kasab killed many civilians, police officers and troops and released video tapes of the murders. Pakistani forces have made significant gains against the militants in their Swat offensive after Taliban advances and attacks raised fears for nuclear-armed Pakistan's future. Attacks have tapered off in recent weeks after the death of the Pakistani Taliban on Aug 5. (Reuters)

In China, Babies Stolen by Officials for Foreign Adoption

BY BARBARA DEMICK
LOS ANGELES TIMES

TIANXI, China - The man from family planning liked to prowling around the mountaintop village, looking for diapers on clotheslines and listening for the cry of a hungry newborn. One day in the spring of 2004, he presented himself at Yang Shuiying's doorstep and commanded: “Bring out the baby.”

Yang wept and argued, but, alone with her 4-month-old daughter, she was in no position to resist the man every parent in Tianxi feared.

“I'm going to sell the baby for foreign adoption. I can get a lot of money for her,” he told the sobbing mother as he drove her with the baby to an orphanage in Zhenyuan, a nearby city in the southern province of Guizhou. In return, he promised that the family wouldn't have to pay fines for violating China's one-child policy.

Then he warned her: “Don't tell anyone about it.”

For five years, she kept the terrible secret. “I didn't understand that they didn't have the right to take our babies,” she said.

Since the early 1990s, more than 80,000 Chinese children have been adopted abroad, and the majority

has been adopted by Americans.

The conventional wisdom is that the babies, mostly girls, were abandoned by their parents because of the traditional preference for boys and China's restrictions on family size. No doubt, that was the case for tens of thousands of the girls, but some parents are beginning to come forward to tell harrowing stories of babies who were taken away by coercion, fraud or kidnapping—sometimes by government officials who covered their tracks by pretending that the babies had been abandoned.

Parents who say their children were taken complain that officials were motivated by the \$3,000 per child that adoptive parents pay orphanages.

“Our children were exported abroad like they were factory products,” said Yang Libing, a migrant worker from Hunan province whose daughter was seized in 2005. He has since learned that she is in the US.

Doubts about how babies are procured for adoption in China have begun to ripple through the international adoption community.

“In the beginning, I think, adoption from China was a very good

UN Confident Afghan Vote Will Be Resolved By Winter

REUTERS

KABUL, Afghanistan - The UN is confident Afghanistan's election can be resolved before winter, with ballots already being printed to hold a second round if a fraud investigation makes that necessary, a spokesman said on Sunday.

Preliminary results show president Hamid Karzai with 54.6 percent of the vote—enough to win the Aug 20 poll in a single round—but a UN-backed watchdog has ordered a partial recount because of fraud.

If the recount eliminates enough of Karzai's votes so that he no longer scores more than 50 percent, a second round must be held against his main opponent, former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah.

A senior Afghan election official said on Saturday that a second round, if necessary, would have to be held by the third week in October or be postponed until next year because of harsh weather that makes much of the country inaccessible.

That would give the fraud investigators just two weeks to complete

their recount to allow two more weeks for campaigning.

UN spokesman Aleem Siddique said he was confident the recount could be completed fast enough to either crown Karzai the victor in the first round or hold the runoff this year.

As a precaution, officials have already ordered ballot papers be printed up for the possible second round, he said.

“We all recognize the difficulty in holding a second round as winter approaches, but all that does is increase our determination to put all our efforts into having a second round this year, if it's needed,” Siddique said.

The UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission has ordered a recount of about 10 percent of polling stations after finding “clear and convincing evidence of fraud.”

An EU observer mission describes as “suspicious” more than a quarter of votes, including more than one-third of those cast for Karzai. The president acknowledges some fraud but says its was exaggerated.

thing because there were so many abandoned girls. But then it became a supply-and-demand-driven market and a lot of people at the local level were making too much money,” said Ina Hut, who last month resigned as the head of the Netherlands' largest adoption agency out of concern about baby trafficking.

The Chinese Center for Adoption Affairs, the government agency that oversees foreign and domestic adoption, rejected repeated requests for comment. Officials of the agency have told foreign diplomats that they believe the abuses are limited to a small number of babies and those responsible have been removed and punished.

For adoptive parents, the possibility that their children were forcibly taken from their birth parents is terrifying.

“When we adopted in 2006, we were fed the same stories, that there were millions of unwanted girls in China, that they would be left on the street to die if we didn't help,” said Cathy Wagner, an adoptive mother from Nova Scotia, Canada. “I love my daughter, but if I had any idea my money would cause her to be taken away from another mother who loved her, I

never would have adopted.”

The problem is rooted in China's population controls, which limit most families to one child, two if they live in the countryside and the first is a girl. Each town has a family planning office, usually staffed by loyal Communist party cadres who have broad powers to order abortions and sterilizations. People who have additional babies can be fined up to six times their annual income—fines euphemistically called “social service expenditures,” which are an important source of revenue for local governments in rural areas.

“The family planning people are even more powerful than the Ministry of Public Security,” said Yang Zhizhu, a legal scholar in Beijing.

Throughout the countryside, red banners exhort, “Give birth to fewer babies, plant more trees” and, more ominously, “If you give birth to extra children, your family will be ruined.”

The law, however, does not give officials the power to take babies from their parents. Some families say they were beaten and threatened into giving up their daughters, or tricked into signing away their parental rights.

OPINION

About Happiness, France's Sarkozy is Leading the Way

BY WILL HUTTON
THE OBSERVER

The Soviet Union used to judge itself on how much iron and how many tractors it produced. Britain used to measure itself by the size and reach of its navy, while Germany had its army. Today, Western societies measure the growth of their GDP, because such material advance is what we believe counts.

But Western societies have been changing again as their peoples move beyond valuing themselves in terms of cars, fridges and TVs. We have always wanted to be the authors of our own lives. People choose a life they have reason to value, as famous Indian economist Amartya Sen once put it. And over my lifetime, more people—although not enough—have been doing just that.

We want our work to be meaningful and satisfying. If key relationships do not work we divorce. We try to be the best parents we can, not just “good enough.” We no longer affiliate ourselves with mainstream parties because one ideology no longer expresses the complexities of our choices. We are worried about the environment, climate change, traffic congestion and the security of where we live.

However, as nations, we carry on measuring the growth of goods and services that are sold in the marketplace as if it were the only thing that matters. It is not. David Cameron, leader of the British opposition Conservative party, expressed this unease when he tried to launch a discussion about promoting greater national well-being, but he was decried by the UK's redneck media and timid politicians as a tree-hugging quiche-eater who should get back to what politicians do—finding lines of division with their opponents, promoting business, limiting workers' rights and slashing back the state. Cameron, though, was right and it is a pity he has retreated to being a typical British politician.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has been seized by the same conviction and last year he commissioned the world's best economists led by Nobel Prize-winner Joseph Stiglitz to report on how best economic performance and social progress could be measured. Last week, they reported with a well-reasoned, technical but devastatingly radical document that could change our lives.

They damn GDP as hopelessly inadequate, even in its own terms. A car produced in 2009 is very different from one in 1979, so why compare them? GDP does not reflect the world because it cannot reflect inequality. It does not reflect the sustainability of growth, not just in environmental but in economic terms. For example, if the growth of indebtedness had been offset against traditional GDP growth between 2004 and 2007, the numbers would have looked a lot less rosy and the impending crisis would have seemed a lot more obvious. To measure and worry about all of this would transform the public policy debate.

But the extraordinary group of thinkers Sarkozy commissioned do not stop there. Having been asked to measure social progress, they have had to identify what it is. Their answer is uncompromising. It is about promoting our well-being—and that is necessarily multi-dimensional. Obviously, material wealth counts, but it must take account of the defects listed above. Then there is the degree to which people can organize their personal lives around the activities they value, including getting satisfaction from work. The quality of housing has an immense impact on our satisfaction, again unmeasured and not included. So, change that.

A fascinating table on the respective values of American and French women reveals that while American women want to walk more than make love, French women rank making love as their number one activity, not caring much for walking. And nobody much liked work, even though so much time is spent there. More effort should be made to promote decent, fulfilling work, says the commission, and then measure and include it in the composite measure of progress. Surveys could and should consistently capture what we want to do with our time, whether we do it and how much we enjoy it.

The Anger Facing Obama Isn't Just Black And White Anger

BY JIM SLEEPER
THE WASHINGTON POST

Racism is only one of many factors driving the backlash against the president in town hall meetings and demonstrations on Capitol Hill. President Barack Obama has been right to discount it, because a white president would feel some scorching heat, too. Just hours before Representative Joe Wilson's brazen “You lie!” interrupted Obama's address to Congress, the conservative majority on the Supreme Court welcomed arguments against restricting business-corporate funding of “Hillary: The Movie”—a relic of rage on the presidential primary campaign trail that presaged what Hillary Clinton would be enduring now were she, not Obama, in the White House.

Sexism and racism aren't the only pretexts, though, recall the swift-boating of Senator John Kerry during the 2004 campaign and the unending conservative rage against former president Bill Clinton. Republican House leader John Boehner got close to the truth when he told ABC News last spring that people he met at “taxpayer protests” are “scared to death...about the future...and the facts that the American dream may not be alive for their kids and grandkids.”

Boehner lacks credible answers for these Americans, who are viscerally and legitimately afraid that they'll never again make \$28 an hour, afford health insurance or own a home. It's the absence of honest answers, more than racism, that's turned out people brandishing signs that liken Obama to Hitler and demanding, with stupefying illogic, that government keep its hands off their Medicare. Are liberals going to deliver the answers the other side or will they be sidetracked by their constant preoccupation with identity politics?

Fear and rage that ran far deeper than race were palpable at the 2008 Republican National Convention, where Senator John McCain found

himself coping anyway with a large contingent of young delegates whose repertoire of political expression consisted mainly of shouting “Yoo Es Ay! Yoo Es Ay!”

No matter how subtle, subdued or dignified McCain's appeals to patriotism in his acceptance speech, the chorus grew so loud that at times it seemed an eruption of the Republican's militaristic id, and even the war-hero candidate looked annoyed.

Yet it would be a mistake to feel disdain for these guys, for their buffoonish chanting was only one side of them, and not necessarily the dominant one. They haven't curdled into fascists, as some on the left seemed to think. More likely, the thwarted decency in them is trying to find a political home is slipping away.

With encouragement from Rush Limbaugh and some Republican leaders, they're taking the path of least resistance and blaming an easy mark—a government they can vote out of office—rather than the immense, private bureaucracies they're beholden to, can't touch at the polls and will find even harder to resist if John Roberts' Supreme Court voids restrictions on corporate “free speech” in campaigns.

Some of them listen to Limbaugh and they recycle his wisdom as their own at the bar, the family dinner table or the diner. Racism, sexism, Islam, “big government”—anything will serve, if it spares them having to face being had by the unaccountable powers and riptides that are destroying their dreams.

The mistake of crying racism is especially tempting to upscale, influential liberals who, no less than protesters on the right, are ducking the true causes of dispossession, fear and rage: the premises and practices of financial capital, predatory consumer marketing and a national-security state boondoggling.

Remember the moralistic passion plays over the dubious black church “arson epidemic”? Or the supposed “ethnic cleansing” in congressional redistricting in which black incumbents actually won in majority-white districts? That politics of “anti-racist” paroxysm eclipsed the real challenges, which have only worsened since then.

Jim Sleeper, a lecturer in political science at Yale University, is the author of “Liberal Racism” and “The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York.”

The BURMA DAILY

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