

# The BURMA DAILY

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## Suu Kyi Meets High-Ranking Burma Official

REUTERS

RANGOON - Detained pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi met a high-level official in Burma's military-ruled government for a second time in a week following her offer to lobby the West to lift sanctions.

A source in Burma's Home Ministry said Suu Kyi held talks at a state guesthouse for 25 minutes with Labor Minister Aung Kyi, a go-between who has met the Nobel Peace Prize winner seven times in the last two years.

The two met on Saturday for the first time since January 2008, but neither Suu Kyi, detained for 14 of the last 20 years, nor the junta revealed what was discussed.

Suu Kyi's lawyer, Nyan Win, had not been informed of the talks and said he was denied access to Suu Kyi to discuss her appeal to the Supreme Court over her 18-month sentence for a security breach while under house arrest in May.

"We hope to find out what was discussed when we meet again," said Nyan Win, who is also a spokesman for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

"It seems Aung Kyi is conveying messages between [junta leader] Than Shwe and Suu Kyi."

Suu Kyi made a formal offer to the regime on Sept 25 to meet Western diplomats to discuss the impact of sanctions, which critics say have been ineffective and have hurt the Burmese people. She has said she is willing to work with the generals and use her influence to mediate with the West.

The US held talks last week with representatives of the Burma government but emphasized that lifting sanctions would be a mistake because the regime has yet to improve its human rights record.

The talks came after Burma last month sent its prime minister to the UN General Assembly for the first time in 14 years, a move seen by analysts as part of a charm offensive to court international support for the polls.

Aung Zaw, editor of the Thailand-based Irrawaddy magazine, suggested the generals were using Suu Kyi for their own gain and warned not to expect any substantive change.



Reuters

Hundreds of typhoon victims continue to live inside a gymnasium due to prolonged flooding in Pasig city, east of Manila yesterday.

## Thai Villagers Try To Halt Disappearing Coast

REUTERS

BANG KHUN THIEN, Thailand - Some villagers use bamboo fencing. Others plant mangroves. And some do both to fight back against erosion transforming centuries-old communities on the Gulf of Thailand.

Only a half hour drive south of Bangkok, coastal regions already show alarming signs of erosion: electricity poles, once on land, are submerged in parts of Bang Khun Thien, a district on the outskirts of Bangkok.

Kongsak Lerkngam, who lives in Bang Khun Thien and works on an erosion protection initiative in six coastal provinces, said about 461 hectares of village land have disappeared in the past 30 years at a rate of between 1.2 to 4.6 meters a year.

Caused by a combination of expanding fishing industries such as shrimp farms and global warming that has raised sea levels, the erosion has wiped out many of the mangrove forests that once offered a natural buffer on the Gulf of Thailand coast.

"The forest is gone," Kongsak said of the mangroves.

"In the past, erosion was not this intense but now the erosion is very intense," he added.

Most of the affected regions were cleared of mangroves by shrimp farms, a big business in Thailand that brings in \$2 billion in exports a year.

Some villagers are fighting back with varying degrees of success. In 1999, about 46 villages began planting mangroves in an attempt to revive the ecosystem of trees and shrubs that once formed a coastal barrier to protect their communities.

Their goal: stop the ripples caused mostly by fishing boats from reaching the water's edge where many homes are built.

Other villages take a different approach.

In Kok Kham, a fishing community in the province of Samut Sakhon, some villagers have built bamboo fences by submerging about 100 bamboo sticks, each about 5 meters long, in triangle-shaped groups along the coast.

The idea is to prevent big ripples from reaching the coast and allow mud and debris to collect on the fence to form a barrier, said Narin Boonruam, a 71-year-old leader of the Kok Kham Conservation group. "This helps relieve coastal erosion."

But the bamboo fences protect just 2 km of Samut Sakhon's 42 km of coast.

Still, Narin said he is satisfied with the result. Sediment behind the fences has swelled to 1.5 meters thick in just two years. Mangrove trees have also been planted but are too thin to withstand strong ripples and protect the coast, he added.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature, a network of campaign groups, governments, scientists and other experts, described the local techniques as a good answer to a troubling problem in Thailand.

According to a 2007 World Bank report, about 1,500 sq km of Gulf of Thailand mangrove forest has been deforested and replaced by shrimp farms.

## REGIONAL

# Briefing

## Thai Court To Hear Gov't Appeal in Estate Case

BANGKOK - A Thai court agreed yesterday to hear a government's appeal of an order suspending operations at the nation's largest industrial estate, clearing the way for operations there to resume pending a final ruling. "The court has accepted the appeal and has assigned the judges to work out whether to uphold the order directed by the lower court," a Supreme Administrative Court official said. A surprise order by the Central Administrative Court last week to suspend operations at 76 plants at Rayong's Map Ta Phut Industrial Estate, also the world's eighth-largest petrochemical hub, could dampen investment. The value of the plants is estimated at about \$9.90 billion. Of the 76 projects, 25 belong to energy giant PTT and its group including PTT Aromatics and Refining and PTT Chemical. A year-long production halt at the estate would cut 0.4 percent off economic growth, Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij has said. (Reuters)

## Earthquake Survivor Says Saved by Coffee Stop

PADANG, Indonesia - An Indonesian earthquake survivor described yesterday how buying a coffee during a hotel training course he was attending almost certainly saved his life. Ghazali, 28, had been taking part in a training program with 40 people held by insurance firm Prudential at the historic Dutch-era Ambacang hotel when the quake hit the coastal city of Padang on Sept 30. The trainee insurance agent, who is now staying with relatives, said he briefly left the hotel to buy a coffee in a cafe 300 meters across the street because drinks in the hotel were too pricey for him. "I sat down and the hotel collapsed," he said, adding that he had been too shocked since to tell authorities he was safe. "It is still a traumatic experience and I just haven't gotten around to it," he explained. He added that as far as he was aware only one other person from the Prudential training course had survived. Asked about how he felt about the earthquake and his escape, the university student said: "This is merely something that God has decided upon." Rescue teams have been trying to extract more bodies at the Ambacang. (Reuters)

# Program Eases Lives of Vietnamese in US Suburb

By MY-THUAN TRAN  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES - Annie Mai knows what it's like to be the only Vietnamese student in class. She understands what it is to have parents who work long hours and are unable to help their children with schoolwork. And she can relate when a child must translate for her parents during teacher conferences.

Mai was 7 when her family arrived in Orange County in 1979 and was immediately confronted with such challenges. Now an education consultant for the Garden Grove Unified School District, she knows that Vietnamese families still face many of the same difficulties.

The 48,000-student district has struggled to reach out to the Vietnamese community since refugees began settling in this middle-class suburb after the war, dramatically changing its demographics. In Garden Grove schools, the proportion of Vietnamese has shot up from 3 percent of students in 1977 to nearly 30 percent today.

Mai, a former teacher in Garden Grove, believes that the district has found a way to better connect with Vietnamese parents: through a talk show program on Radio Bolsa, KALI-FM (106.3), at 7 pm Wednesdays.

"Sometimes Vietnamese parents aren't going to come to the school, they're not going to ask the teacher, they aren't going to share with an administrator," said Mai, one of the hosts. "But they will listen to the radio show."

Called "Youth and Education," the program is geared toward Vietnamese-speaking parents who are unfamiliar with the US school system and want tips on helping their children through school. Topics include getting kids ready for the year and finding financial aid for college. There are also shows about special education and online bullying.

The show reaches out to parents like John Nguyen, 48, who immigrated to the US in his 30s and is now raising two sons who go to Ethan Allen Elementary School in Garden Grove. Nguyen, his wife and mother-in-law listen to the radio show every week.

"The show brings up topics that I never thought of before," said Nguyen, who owns a graphic design business. "I never went to high school or middle school here, like a lot of Vietnamese parents. That's why there are a lot of things

we don't know."

Nguyen said he had learned about after-school programs, programs for gifted students and how to prepare students to transfer to other schools. Nguyen, a PTA member, has also been a guest on the show, encouraging Vietnamese parents to volunteer at schools.

The show is making a difference, said Garden Grove administrators, who are looking at replicating the program for Spanish- and Korean-speaking parents.

Parents "feel more connected to the Garden Grove school district," said Debbie Youngblood, director of kindergarten-through-12th-grade education. "We're helping them navigate the educational system better."

Vietnamese parents in neighboring Westminster and Fountain Valley also tune in to Radio Bolsa. The show even gets calls from out-of-state parents who access the show through the Internet, Mai said.

A frequent topic is how to balance Vietnamese and US cultures.

"How can I make sure my kid keeps practicing Vietnamese?" one parent asked during a recent show. "He keeps speaking to me in English, and I'm afraid he's losing his language."

The hosts suggested playing games with children, such as asking them to translate songs they learned in school.

Language and cultural barriers have been a constant challenge for both teachers and Vietnamese parents, many of whom experienced different learning styles and parent-teacher interactions in their homeland.

"Things like prom, sports, theater class—those are things that most parents learned growing up in the US," said Lan Nguyen, one of

two Vietnamese members of the Garden Grove Board of Education. "Many immigrant parents did not know what to expect from school. They didn't know what they needed to do, and they don't understand how to help their children."

Vietnamese parent participation at open houses and school events has been a challenge, Nguyen said, even though Garden Grove Unified has a Vietnamese community liaison, translators for conferences and Vietnamese-language outreach meetings.

The lack of participation stems from a culture in Vietnam in which parents are largely removed from their children's classroom education, Mai said.

Recently, she and other hosts tried to tackle those issues with a segment about the differences between the Vietnamese and US schools.

"In Vietnam, the teacher has the complete and full responsibility for the education of your children," said Quyen Di, a lecturer at UCLA, who was the in-studio guest. "Here it's not necessarily the case."

He urged parents to attend open houses and conferences even if they didn't feel completely comfortable speaking in English.

"Vietnamese parents tend to say, 'The way the teacher teaches is good enough. I don't have an opinion,'" he said. "But you should have the opportunity to participate in the activities of the school."

Mai said she had seen more parents attending sports games and open houses since the show started.

"It's really been incredibly empowering to our parents," Mai said. "They're much more aware. They're asking their children more questions. It's opening a lot more dialogue."

## — Regional Brief —

### Indonesia Wants Lower Natuna Gas Project Split

JAKARTA - Indonesia wants oil companies partnering with state oil and gas firm Pertamina to develop the \$40 billion Natuna natural gas project to get a lower production split, a senior energy ministry source said yesterday. The government has been in a contractual dispute with oil major Exxon Mobil Corp over the Natuna D-Alpha block, which has about 6.3 trillion cubic meters of gas reserves. Indonesia said last year it had awarded Pertamina operating rights as it said Exxon Mobil's contract giving it a 76 percent share had expired in 2005. The US oil major has said the contract ran until this year. "Pertamina will get a 40 percent production split in Natuna. This is special privilege from the government for Pertamina," the source, who declined to be quoted by name, said. "The question is what the partner should get. The government wants the partner to get less than 40 percent," the source added. Indonesia has a standard gas production split of 70 percent in favor of the government and 30 percent for an investor. The government also wanted Pertamina to choose its partners as soon as possible. (Reuters)

## INTERNATIONAL

## Can UN Anti-Deforestation Scheme Save the Forests in Kenya?

By JOHN VIDAL  
THE GUARDIAN

RUKINGA RANCH, Kenya - Rukinga ranch in southern Kenya prides itself on the immense herds of elephants, giraffe, lions and wild dogs that have made a home among its 32,000 hectares of acacia trees in the decade since cattle were banned. But the wildlife sanctuary's guards, who risk their lives to defend the animals from poachers, face an even greater danger.

Rukinga is on the frontline of global deforestation: every month, dozens of gangs of commercial charcoal-makers are caught cutting down trees and building fire pits to make cooking fuel for the port city of Mombasa 150 km away. No one knows how many thousands of tons of trees are lost a year, but there are forecasts that the reserve could be like much of the land between it and the coast—semi-desert, treeless and devoid of animals—within 20 years.

This grim prediction could change this week if countries holding talks in Bangkok this week agree to back a UN plan to preserve the world's forests by allowing owners to trade the carbon stored in endangered forests on condition the trees are not felled.

If the ranch's owners can show that Rukinga's trees and shrubs are under threat, and independent scientists can calculate the amount of carbon in its forest, the ranch could qualify as an international REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation in developing countries) project, attracting millions of dollars of carbon credits. The carbon saved would be traded on the growing market for voluntary carbon permits and, after 2012, when the successor to the Kyoto treaty should come into force, Rukinga could qualify as an official Kenyan government REDD scheme, attracting public money from Britain and other rich countries seeking to offset emissions they have legally committed to cut.

A British conservationist, Rob Dodwell, and a California-based dotcom millionaire, Mike Korchinsky, the ranch's two main shareholders, say they have spent \$400,000 in six months measuring Rukinga's trees and getting a REDD application validated. Despite concerns about how open to fraud REDD projects are, they are determined to show it can be done properly.

The carbon stored has been provisionally estimated at about 64 tons per hectare. At the present



Reuters

**A Kenyan park ranger, far left, stands near residents who live on disputed land at the Mau forest. A familiar Kenyan saga of corruption, illegal landgrabbing and the use of state resources to buy electoral votes has destroyed a quarter of the 400,000-hectare forest in the last decade with an impact that could be felt as far away as Egypt.**

world price of carbon, that could earn Rukinga nearly \$2 million a year—a big return for land bought only 10 years ago for about \$4 a hectare. Dodwell and the 50 local community shareholders of Rukinga will continue to earn money from eco-tourism and cattle, but hope to earn a lot more from farming carbon.

"We calculate that one third of the money earned from carbon will go to protect the forest," said Dodwell. "One third will be cash, like dividends for shareholders, and one sixth will go to the carbon broker. About \$600,000 would go back into the environment every year to protect the trees. It would secure the jobs of the 150 people who already work on Rukinga and it could lead to 100 more jobs.

"The local shareholders who own 10 percent of the ranch would earn a lot of money. The wildlife would benefit from the habitat protection and it would cut climate change emissions."

The local communities were at first bemused, but are now delighted. "When the idea was proposed, we thought, how can you earn money from air? We asked how you could harvest carbon. We wondered if you needed containers," said Alphonse Mwaidoma, the chairman of nearby Kasigau ranch. "Now, everyone realizes it will change everything. Some we would put to long-term development of the community and scholarships."

Dodwell and Korchinsky are also planning to get a 730,000 hectare tract of virgin Cameroonian forest classified as a REDD project, potentially earning themselves and

10,000 forest pygmies who live there nearly \$10 million a year. They say they want local people and wildlife to benefit, but they accept the REDD system is open to abuse by organized crime and corrupt governments and businesses.

"There's a great worldwide scramble going on to find land that would qualify for REDD schemes," said Dodwell.

"REDD has the potential to be fantastic for communities but also to go horribly wrong. Logging companies may turn into carbon companies. In most countries in Africa you can do what you like, log out the trees, put in roads, do anything. There is little or no monitoring. The rewards could be 99 percent for me and 0.5 percent for the communities."

There are signs that nascent REDD projects are already leading

to social conflict, possible fraud and worsening land disputes. In July, the director of climate change in Papua New Guinea was suspended following allegations that unofficial carbon credits worth \$100 million had been issued from 39 potential REDD projects by an Australian-based carbon company. Landowners claimed they had been forced to sign over the rights to their forests by "carbon cowboys." The scandal is embarrassing because Papua New Guinea, which has a history of illegal logging, is leading world efforts to have REDD schemes backed at the UN climate change talks, which culminate in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December.

In Indonesia, where 40 million people depend on forests, potential REDD projects are in limbo because much of the forest has never been surveyed and land ownership is fiercely disputed.

Communities are supposed to earn a share of REDD credit sales to pay for health, education and alternative livelihoods but, out of 144 REDD projects analyzed by the International Institute for Environment and Development, only one included a proposal to make community-managed forests or indigenous peoples' rights a binding part of REDD.

Hans Brattskar, the director of Norway's forest and climate program and whose country is funding the UN-REDD program, said he envisaged some difficulties could be overcome by hi-tech surveillance mixed with on-the-spot monitoring by indigenous peoples. "We know that REDD will need new laws, land reform and new institutions," he said. "But if countries do not perform they will not be paid. The consequences if we fail are enormous."

### Meat Firms Agree To Tough Stance on Deforestation

BRASILIA, Brazil - Four of the biggest companies involved in Brazilian cattle farming have joined forces to stop the purchase of cattle from newly deforested areas of the Amazon. Meat companies Marfrig, Bertin, JBS-Friboi and Minerva Monday signed a formal moratorium in which they pledge better protection for the rainforest. The move follows a three-year Greenpeace investigation, which exposed the link between the expansion of cattle ranching in the Amazon and forest destruction. The investigation prompted calls for action from international companies including food group Princes and footwear manufacturers Clarks, Adidas, Nike and Timberland, which threatened to cancel contracts unless their products were guaranteed to be free from raw materials linked to Amazon destruction. John Sauven, the head of Greenpeace, said the announcement was a significant victory in the fight to protect the Amazon. "Cattle ranching is the single biggest cause of deforestation globally," he said. "The fact that these multibillion-dollar companies have committed to cleaning up their supply chains will lead to real change in the Amazon. "British companies have helped make this happen by getting tough with their suppliers, but this is not the end of the story. We now need to make sure that this agreement is properly enforced and extended to the entire cattle industry in Brazil." (*Guardian*)

## OPINION

## Japan Should Work With US, To Pressure Burma

EDITORIAL  
THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

In an abrupt shift in policy toward Burma, the US government has decided to embark upon direct dialogue with the military junta.

Ever since the military coup 21 years ago, the US has maintained severe sanctions against the ruling junta in an effort to get the generals to embrace democracy. Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest, and many others are being held as political prisoners. The junta appears to be tightening its autocratic rule ahead of general elections scheduled for next year.

Why then has the US chosen this juncture to try to engage Burma in dialogue? Presumably, Washington is concerned that if Burma is left to do as it pleases, the country will become a serious destabilizing factor in world affairs.

New suspicions arose earlier this year that Burma could be building nuclear facilities with the help of North Korea. In June, a North Korean vessel suspected of carry-

ing weapons forbidden under UN sanctions was tracked by US forces. The vessel's destination was believed to have been Burma.

If the junta decides to try its hand at developing nuclear weapons, US policy toward Asia would be uprooted from its foundations. There are fears that drug cultivation would spread. Another concern is China's growing influence in the region.

The US is determined to maintain sanctions while simultaneously opening up a window for dialogue. We hope the US initiative will advance the democratization process. Nothing should be taken for granted, however.

In an address to the recent UN General Assembly, General Thein Sein, who holds the title of prime minister in Burma, called for all sanctions to be lifted. This can be read as an announcement of his intentions to hold the elections under the current military leadership and to continue de facto military rule. To begin with, Burma's new Constitution that was adopted last year is designed to aid and abet

the military. It stipulates that a quarter of the seats in the parliament should be allocated to military personnel.

Burma's general election must be held in a fair and democratic manner.

The government must allow the opposition National League for Democracy, led by Suu Kyi, to freely participate. The international community will not accept a result in which power is transferred to a democratic government in name only, while real power remains in the hands of the junta.

If Burma truly wishes to return to the international fold, the junta should explain clearly, through dialogue with the US, how it intends to move toward democratization.

The Japanese government's diplomatic stance on Burma has been to use the carrot and the stick approach. It has placed a basic freeze on all new aid programs while issuing a standing invitation to a Cabinet member from Burma to visit Japan for talks. But this approach has failed to ease the regime's oppression.

Indonesian  
Corruption  
Sidestep

EDITORIAL  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono won a blowout re-election in July in large part on the back of an impressive record fighting corruption. So Indonesians and foreign investors alike will be troubled that already he is taking a step backward.

Witness the major anticorruption law approved by parliament last week. The bill, drafted by Yudhoyono's Democrat Party-led government, changes the composition of the five-judge panels that hear cases in the country's special corruption court. Three judges on each panel will now come from the ranks of the regular judiciary and only two will be nonjudge lawyers, retired prosecutors and academics. Previously, that ratio was reversed.

This change may look minor, but it will cause big problems in practice. The regular judiciary that will now dominate the anticorruption court is itself notoriously corrupt. And senior judges in the regular judicial corps will have wide discretion in filling their three slots on the panels.

Yudhoyono's decision to go along with this weakening of the anticorruption fight is puzzling. True, the Corruption Eradication Commission that prosecutes cases before the special court is unpopular in some parliamentary circles and Yudhoyono stood down efforts to further weaken the bill before it passed. A compromise on the court supposedly saved other important KPK powers such as the ability to wiretap suspects, which some lawmakers had wanted to strip in an earlier version of the bill but which survived intact.

But the bigger question is why a president recently re-elected with 60 percent of the vote less than three months ago and a record 83 percent approval rating in the run-up to this bill's passage felt the need to give way on such a core issue in the first place. Yudhoyono has already seen the political benefits of holding firm on the corruption fight. He won huge kudos—and political points—earlier this year when he didn't try to interfere as the KPK prosecuted and convicted his son's father-in-law.

Now is not the time to go wobbly.

## In Greece, Papandreou Promises Fresh Start

EDITORIAL  
THE GUARDIAN

The election of a center-left socialist party in Greece bucks the trend of a European Union that has swung to the right. And the good news is that, in George Papandreou, Greece has a prime minister who is not only a decent man but one with a vision for his country.

The emergence of yet another Papandreou as prime minister (his father, Andreas, was elected to the post three times) engenders cynicism. But Papandreou junior is not to the manor born. As foreign minister in the 1990s, he masterminded the policies that led to a tangible improvement in relations with Turkey and Albania, which was no easy feat.

Born in the US and educated in Ontario, Stockholm, the LSE and Harvard, he is closer to Scandinavian-style social democracy than to Greek nationalism. (His return home prompted a newspaper column devoted to his problems in speaking Greek.) But he stuck to his guns. He believes, for instance, in governing by consensus, which is not the first concept that comes to mind in normally fractious Greek politics.

The bad news is the size of the

task. His two predecessors, Costas Simitis and Costas Karamanlis, came to power promising transparency and an end to cronyism and grace-and-favor government. Simitis brought his country into the eurozone, but achieved only incremental change on the reform front. Karamanlis failed altogether.

Papandreou also promises a fresh start. His agenda is large: to reform government, the pension system and the bloated public sector; to increase the tax take; and to crack down on illegal immigration through Turkey. These problems are systemic, so entrenched in the way the state functions that they defy party politics. How can any government reform the state when the system is nobbled by kickbacks and vested interests at every level?

Greece is thought to lose \$17.5 billion in unpaid income taxes and

\$13 billion in other taxes annually—six times the sum that Papandreou has promised to invest to stimulate the economy. The black economy is even bigger, between a quarter and a third of national income. So the big question is: how can he clean up government and boost the economy without feeding the beast he is trying to tame?

Papandreou is unlikely to be given much of a honeymoon. In Brussels his government will seek a two-year extension to the time when the budget deficit, already the second-largest in Europe, has to be halved. But in return Brussels will demand a major reform of the Greek pension system. Papandreou will have to not just manage a crisis-ridden country, but lead it—a task of a different order of difficulty.

## The BURMA DAILY

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