

# The BURMA DAILY

Volume 2 Issue 114

Thursday, October 22, 2009

## Briefing

### Demand Fuels Illegal Burma Timber Trade

BANGKOK - The US may have imported \$3.8 billion of illegal timber products from China last year, much of it likely smuggled from neighboring Burma, where illegal logging is rapidly destroying forests, a report showed. China and Burma have made progress in tackling illegal logging but more must be done to stamp out corruption fueling the trade, London-based Global Witness, an environmental watchdog, said in a report yesterday. China cut its imports of logs and sawn wood from its neighbor by 70 percent between 2005 and 2008, but trade was still thriving due to bribery, falsified documents and poor law enforcement, the report said. The group said illegal logging was still causing rapid destruction of Burma's northeastern forests, with 270,000 cubic meters of logs and 170,000 cubic meters of sawn timber, most of which was illegal, smuggled into China's Kunming province last year. The report estimated the US, Japan, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Russia were the chief destinations of the timber, mostly as furniture. Government crackdowns, it said, had a "significant positive impact" on the flow of wood into China, which is responsible for 10 percent of global trade in illegal timber. (Reuters)

### North Korean Asylum Seekers Leave Vietnam

HANOI - Nine North Koreans who entered the Danish embassy in Hanoi nearly a month ago seeking asylum left Vietnam on Tuesday, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry said. "The case of the Koreans running into the Danish embassy has been settled by Vietnam and the related parties based on Vietnamese law as well as international laws and practice," spokeswoman Nguyen Phuong Nga said. "On October 20 these people exited Vietnam," she said in a statement. Nga did not say their destination, but the Danish foreign ministry had said after the North Koreans pushed their way into the embassy on Sept 24 they would not be sent back "to an uncertain destiny." The Danish and South Korean embassies offered no comment. More than 16,000 North Koreans have defected to the South since the end of the Korean War, almost all in the past 10 years, according to the South. (Reuters)



Reuters

Fishermen fix nets after cancelling their trip in preparation for Typhoon Lupit in Aparri, northern Luzon's Cagayan province, yesterday. The Philippines began evacuating thousands of people in northern areas prone to floods and landslides on Tuesday ahead of a powerful typhoon that has gained strength over the Pacific, officials said. Typhoon Lupit, which means 'fierce' in Filipino, was expected to make landfall around the far northern tip of the Luzon region by today and dump more rain on typhoon-weary provinces, said Prisco Nilo, head of the weather bureau.

## A Cultural War Between Indonesia and Malaysia

BY JOHN GLIONNA  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

JAKARTA - For decades, Uni Histayanti has performed the enigmatic movements of her country's traditional pendetpendet dance. She learned the rhythms as an infant and years ago opened a dinner theater here in the Indonesian capital where, dressed in native costume, she performs nightly.

As she flutters her arms bird-like, darts her eyes and tilts her head at exotic angles, she invokes the welcoming spirit of the Hindu-majority Bali island where it originated centuries ago.

That's why it floored her to hear that neighboring Malaysia had reportedly tried to seize the pendet as its own. It's pure cultural piracy, Histayanti insists. And it makes her mad.

"It's a symbol of our heritage, not theirs," she said as she applied makeup in a backstage dressing room of her theater. "If you have something and someone tries to steal it, you take it back."

These two predominantly Muslim neighbors, which share ethnic and physical traits, are engaged in a

tense struggle for superiority.

Nowadays, the rift is widening. It's cultural. It's political. And recently, it has gotten personal.

Many Malaysians dismiss the teeming Indonesian archipelago as a source for the low-class maids, parking-lot jockeys and waiters who work in Kuala Lumpur and other cities in Malaysia.

For their part, Indonesians icily counter that Malaysia is so desperate for a culture that it will resort to anything—even outright theft—to acquire one.

The pendet dance tiff, the latest slugfest over so-called proprietary traditions, emerged this summer when rumors spread that Malaysia was responsible for television ads claiming the invention of the pendet dance.

Within days, a private company producing a program for the Discovery Channel admitted they were behind the ads and that they had mistakenly picked the wrong dance to promote their upcoming program. The Malaysian government, they explained, had nothing to do with the foul-up.

But it was too late. Indonesia's

feathers had been ruffled.

Indonesia's tourism minister demanded a written apology, which he said was needed for the record.

Meanwhile, outraged Indonesians waged a "Crush Malaysia" campaign reminiscent of a nationalistic tirade in the 1960s.

This time, mobs burned the Malaysian flag, which features a crescent moon and sun, and threw rotten eggs at the embassy in Jakarta.

For days, protesters wielding sharpened bamboo sticks stopped traffic in search of Malaysian motorists and pedestrians. Six Indonesians were arrested. No one was injured, but the Malaysian Embassy complained about the safety of its citizens.

Internet hackers attacked Malaysian government websites. One nationalist youth group began collecting signatures on the Internet for volunteers willing to go to war with Malaysia.

Though the leaders of the youth group concede that such a face-off is extremely unlikely, they say they have stockpiled food, medicine and

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## REGIONAL

## Philippines Former Leader Eyes 'Last' Bid

REUTERS

MANILA - Former Philippine President Joseph Estrada, removed from office by a popular revolt in 2001, formally announced yesterday he would seek the presidency again, saying he had unfinished business.

"This is the last performance of my life and I will not fail you," Estrada told a cheering crowd of about 9,000 supporters in one of Manila's poorest districts, where he grew up.

The hard-living, 72-year-old former action movie star won the presidency by a landslide in 1998 but was impeached and then removed from office by an army-backed uprising, an act he claims was illegal.

Convicted of economic plunder in 2007, he was later pardoned.

Analysts believe Estrada can perform strongly in the May 2010 election because of his immense popularity among low-income voters and high ratings in opinion surveys.

Two other candidates, Senators Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino and Manuel Villar, have both received higher ratings, although analysts have warned that no trend has yet been established.

Economic analysts have warned that the prospects of an Estrada victory could spook financial markets because of his lack of fiscal discipline and stories of late-night parties with drinking and gambling buddies.

One market analyst described Estrada as an "investment risk."

## China's Asean Infrastructure Fund Shrinks

REUTERS

BEIJING - China's promised \$10 billion in development funds for Southeast Asia is going to be closer to \$1 billion for the time being, diplomats said yesterday ahead of a regional meeting later this week in Thailand.

In April, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao announced China planned to set up a \$10 billion China-Asean Fund on Investment Cooperation to support infrastructure development in the region. Details were vague at the time, and little has been heard of the scheme until now.

"The first phase of the fund will be \$1 billion and the plan for the total fund will be \$10 billion," Assistant Foreign Minister Hu Zhengyue told reporters. "China welcomes other countries, including those in Asean, and institutions to join in the raising of these funds."

Wen will be traveling to the Thai town of Hua Hin for this weekend's meeting, which follows a summit in April that was called off when protesters stormed the venue in the larger resort town of Pattaya.

Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, Trade Minister Chen Deming and Finance Minister Xie Xuren will all accompany Wen, such is the interest of China, which is eager to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, a region where it has deep historic and cultural ties.

Xue Hanqin, China's ambassador to Asean, said that the \$1 billion had already been raised for the fund, which will be disbursed through the China Import-Export Bank.

"We hope it will help Asia develop infrastructure and promote balanced development," she said.

Xue said Southeast Asian countries were still identifying projects, which would likely include road, rail and port schemes where there were gaps in existing networks.

Hu said the projects could include large-scale energy and

resource sector projects.

China and Asean together account for about one-third of the world's population and one-ninth of global gross domestic product.

China is the eighth biggest investor in Asean, with outstanding two-way investment totaling \$11.7 billion at the end of 2008. A Free Trade Agreement between Asean and China, its fourth-largest trading partner, will come into effect Jan 1.

### — Regional Briefs —

#### Bruneians Want Cheating Husbands Whipped

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Brunei - Most Bruneians want husbands who cheat on their wives to be whipped, according to a recent survey in the Muslim-majority country. The survey, conducted by website brudirect (www.brudirect.com), found 76 percent of 272 respondents said men should be whipped for having affairs while only 55 percent said unfaithful wives should receive the same punishment. "The result of the survey is an indication of the pent-up feelings that women harbour against irresponsible men," an unnamed social worker from Brunei was quoted as saying on the website. The oil-rich state of Brunei, located on Borneo Island, has a population of almost 400,000 of which 66 percent are Muslim. (Reuters)

#### Beyonce Delays Malaysia Concert Over Islamist Ire

NEW YORK - Beyonce has postponed a concert in Malaysia after accusations by Islamic conservatives that the show would be immoral, The Associated Press reported. But the Malaysian entertainment company that planned to present the show said the postponement was solely Beyonce's decision and had "nothing to do with other external reasons." The company, MarcTensia, tried last month to address concerns that Beyonce might wear outfits considered inappropriate, saying "all parties have come to an amicable understanding" about stage costumes. A new date for the show, at a stadium in Kuala Lumpur, was not announced. Beyonce canceled a 2007 concert in Malaysia after the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party and other groups threatened protests over her provocative clothing and image. (NYT)

#### Thai King's Condition 'Satisfactory,' Palace Says

BANGKOK - The health of Thailand's 81-year-old monarch was "satisfactory," the palace said yesterday, a week after the country's stock market tumbled over concerns about his health and lengthy spell in hospital. "The committee of royal physicians reported that his majesty the king's general condition is satisfactory. He has a good appetite and can sleep well," said a statement from the Bureau of the Royal Household. Lung inflammation had subsided, blood tests showed, it said. (Reuters)

## Cultural...

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weapons such as samurai swords and ninja throwing-stars.

Such high jinks baffle many Malaysians, not to mention Indonesians.

"These guys with pointed sticks, they're from the loony left," said Ong Hock Chuan, a Malaysian-born public relations consultant who lives in Jakarta. "If it wasn't Malaysia, they'd vent their anger at something else."

But many others here say the resentment is widespread and runs deep.

Newspapers run stories about mistreatment of some of the 2 million Indonesian workers by

their bosses in Malaysia. Last year, Indonesia temporarily stopped sending maids to Malaysia until better security was provided for the workers.

"Many who want to invade Malaysia are former migrant workers or people who know one," said Aleksius Jemadu, a political scientist at Pelita Harapan University in Indonesia. "There is a sense that Malaysians look down on us. They insult us. And to tell you the truth, many Indonesians are secretly envious because they view most Malaysians as being better off than us."

The two governments also remain at loggerheads.

"Each wants to be seen as the regional leader in Southeast Asia," he said. "They both claim to be the

leading Muslim nation."

A fresh skirmish of the culture wars breaks out now and then when Indonesians claim Malaysians have yet again plagiarized their indigenous art and music.

Malaysians have reportedly laid claim to the Indonesian reog performances — a mix of dance and magic, as well as the angklung, a bamboo musical instrument, activists say.

In 2007, Indonesia threatened legal action against Malaysia for allegedly co-opting Indonesian songs and dances in its national tourism campaign. That resulted in a high-profile panel being convened to settle the dispute.

Many in Indonesia claim that even Malaysia's national anthem

borrowed from an Indonesian song. Experts solicited to settle the fight reported that both songs borrow from a 19th century French tune.

At home, many Indonesians say, Malaysians are protective of their own culture.

When a wave of Indonesian pop music began receiving play on radio stations there a year ago, officials sought to set a strict quota: 90% Malaysian songs and 10% Indonesian.

The vitriol and bad feelings spill over into politics.

Animosity rose this summer after two Jakarta hotels were bombed, an attack apparently planned by a Malaysian citizen linked to al-Qaida, Noordin Mohammad Top, who was later killed.

## INTERNATIONAL

# Kurdish Rebels Surrender as Turkey Reaches Out to Them

BY NICHOLAS BIRCH  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ISTANBUL, Turkey - In the first concrete sign that months of efforts by Turkey's government to end a 25-year Kurdish insurgency could bear fruit, eight Kurdish rebels crossed over the border from Iraq on Monday to give themselves up.

Accompanied by 26 Kurdish villagers who fled Turkey more than a decade ago, the members of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, were detained by police and taken in for questioning by Turkish prosecutors.

Though not the first time such a gesture has been made, it comes months into what Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has described as his government's "democratic opening" to Turkey's Kurdish population, who make up about a fifth of Turkey's 70 million inhabitants. The PKK has fought a guerrilla war aimed at separating Kurdish areas from the rest of Turkey. Tens of thousands of people, mostly Kurds, have been killed since the fighting began in 1984.

"If they are released, then this is a historic turning point, the start of the PKK's descent from the moun-

tains," Mehmet Metiner, a former adviser to Erdogan, said of the eight PKK members, in a telephone interview.

The returning Kurdish villagers are likely to be questioned and set free, according to Nusirevan Elci, one of 45 lawyers who traveled to the border to represent the group. About 11,000 Kurdish civilians who fled Turkey in the 1990s live in a UN refugee camp across the border in Iraq.

It was unclear Monday what would happen to the PKK members. The PKK says that none of the eight took an active part in the war. They are expected to benefit from a law pardoning rebels not involved in violence. However, prosecutors could charge them with membership of a terrorist organization. Several PKK members who surrendered themselves in similar circumstances in 1999 are still in prison. The PKK is listed as a terrorist organization by the US and the European Union, as well as by Turkey.

Since May, when Turkish President Abdullah Gul talked of "a historic opportunity" to bring peace to Turkey's impoverished and war-torn Kurdish regions, the

country has engaged in an unprecedented, open debate on the Kurdish issue. But the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, has yet to reveal details of Erdogan's opening.

In a three-page letter destined for the Turkish authorities, the PKK members who crossed the border Monday said they were handing themselves over "to assist in ending bloodshed...and to strengthen the foundations of a peaceful solution."

"We want to show that we are on the side of peace, and we call for all sides to support the peace process," PKK spokesman Roj Welat said in a telephone interview from the group's headquarters in the Iraqi Kurdish mountains.

Acting on the orders of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who was captured and imprisoned in Turkey in 1999, a second "peace group" was expected to arrive in Turkey from Western Europe yesterday.

The PKK spokesman said it was "too early" to say whether Erdogan's "peace group" would be followed by others.

AKP politicians reacted cautiously to the news of the PKK

group's arrival. "This should not be turned into a vehicle for propaganda," AKP Deputy Chairman Huseyin Celik told NTV, as Turkish television showed tens of thousands of Kurds gathered near the border to greet the group, waving flags and dancing. Devlet Bahceli, leader of Turkey's Nationalist Action Party, warned Sunday that Erdogan's opening to the Kurds amounted in fact to "the dissolution of Turkey."

Despite such opposition and previous false starts, Cevat Ones, a former deputy head of Turkey's domestic intelligence service, said in a telephone interview that Turkey has changed radically over the past decade, increasing the chances for success.

"On one side you have a country which is ready for peace and a government with the will to push it through, on the other a terrorist group which knows that war is no longer an alternative," he said. If the government now announces a road map for change, and the PKK pulls an estimated 2,000 militants into Iraq from Turkey, Ones added, "the PKK could be persuaded to disarm completely within six months."

## Recent ETA Arrests Raise Hopes in Spain of Ending Violence

BY ANDRES CALA  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

MADRID, Spain - The arrests of two political leaders of the Spanish separatist group ETA this week—the latest in a series of high-profile operations against the outlawed organization—is raising cautious optimism in Spain that the 50-year-old violent struggle for Basque independence could be entering a new phase.

"It seems we are winning," Interior Minister Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba said Monday after a news conference that announced the capture of Aitor Elizaran Aguilar, ETA's top ideologue.

Rubalcaba, who warned that ETA was far from defeated and still able to carry out deadly attacks, described the fight against the group as a gradual struggle. He said arrests had grown more frequent, making it harder for ETA to adapt and pushing it to resort to younger, less-trained militants.

ETA, which is listed as a terrorist organization by the European Union and the US, has killed more than 800 people in its campaign.

Elizaran, 30, was arrested on Monday in Carnac, France, along with a top aide, Oihana San Vicente, 32. Last week, there were the arrest

and arraignment of seven people accused of trying to rebuild Batasuna, the political party aligned with ETA.

Among those arrested last week was Arnaldo Otegi, the public face of ETA in Spain, who has been jailed several times for leading Batasuna, which was outlawed in 2003. He was accused of trying to rebuild the political party under a different name.

The arrest of Elizaran was the latest triumph of a joint French and Spanish effort. His detention came less than one year after he replaced Javier Lopez Peña, alias Thierry, who was captured in France in May 2008.

In a five-month period starting late last year, the French and Spanish authorities also captured three military leaders, each one replacing the other: Jurdan Martitegui in April, Aitzol Iriondo in December and Mikel Garikoitz in November. All three were arrested in France; all were younger than 40.

So far this year, 84 people have been arrested in connection with ETA violence, although they include political and social leaders not directly affiliated with the group, according to the Interior Ministry.

That is fewer than the arrests for 2008 and in line with the 125 arrests during 2007 after the government stepped up efforts against ETA after the 2006 bombing of Madrid Barajas International Airport.

Police pressure is also weakening ETA's social and political grassroots support, analysts say. Most of the group's militants have been recruited from within Basque leftist, nationalist youth organizations that often face off with the police in violent street battles, according to the government.

Denying ETA a political and social base, coupled with police pressure on the militants, has diminished the group's operational capability, analysts and Basque political leaders agree.

"There is no doubt ETA's political breathing room is diminishing and, in turn, its operational capability" said Oscar Elia, an analyst with the Madrid-based Strategic Studies Group. "We are talking about a leaner ETA. They don't have the training of the old guard. They are clumsy and make more mistakes, but they are also more radicalized and violent. The question is how long ETA will be able to keep up replacing its cadre."

Elia warned, however, that the government risked being too optimistic, especially given the group's ability to adapt. It is not about single high-profile arrests, he said, "but of the constant pressure that will bring about the defeat of ETA."

Jon Abril, the deputy leader of Aralar, a Basque nationalist party that has distanced itself from ETA's violence, agreed. "We notice it on the streets," he said. "Support for an armed struggle is diminishing, even among the rank and file that supported it before. But that doesn't mean ETA agrees."

Basque nationalist parties, including the disbanded Batasuna, began an internal debate in the past few weeks over how to end ETA's violent campaign, Abril said. "We haven't been able to agree on how to end it," he said, "but I think the majority of nationalists are betting on a peaceful solution."

But the government has ruled out negotiating with ETA after several failed attempts that have ended with attacks by the group.

Abril questioned the government's hard tactics. "The state can't continue acting as if nothing is happening here," he said, "ignoring the wishes of Basque institutions."

## OPINION

## Hanoi's Crackdown on Monastery Is of 'Particular Concern'

EDITORIAL  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The US State Department will soon release its annual list of countries of particular concern for religious-rights violations. Hanoi's recent crackdown on a Buddhist community shows why the authoritarian government needs to be reinstated on the roll of offenders.

The group at issue are followers of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen Buddhist based in France and well known outside Vietnam. Hanoi has been trying for a year to shut down the community's Bat Nha monastery in the central highlands. In late September, the authorities finally resorted to violence to evict the 350 monks and nuns after cutting off the electricity supply didn't work. They have taken shelter in a nearby monastery, but the government may not give them residence papers for their new address, in which case they could be forced to

return home.

Hanoi claims the Bat Nha incident was an internal sectarian affair. But leaked government documents show that Hanoi has had the monastery in its sights for at least a year, largely because of what it calls Nhat Hanh's "political" activities. That's likely a referral to the monk's public calls for the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet—a statement that surely angered Hanoi's friends in Beijing. He also leaked 10 recommendations he made to the Vietnamese government in 2007 on improving religious freedom, including a request to disband the country's religious police.

Meanwhile, his teachings simply became too popular. Nhat Hanh is a charismatic leader preaching a progressive form of Buddhism. Crowds of hundreds of Vietnamese regularly flocked to the monastery for special events to pray alongside the monks.

That Hanoi should view all this as a threat to communist one-party rule is predictable and routine. The regime has long harassed religious groups that don't accept full Communist Party control, whether Protestant Montagnards in the central highlands, members of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam wanting to practice their faiths, or Catholic parishioners protesting state seizure of church lands. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom, an agency within the White House, posts a detailed survey of abuses on its website.

But the Bat Nha case still stands out. Nhat Hanh's visit to Vietnam in 2005, after 39 years of exile, was heralded as a breakthrough for religious freedom, as was the fact that he was allowed to establish the Bat Nha community. He played by the rules early on, toning down public statements to avoid offending Hanoi.

He even tried to effect a reconciliation between the state-run Buddhist church and the underground UBCV. Yet the authorities eventually cracked down on his followers anyway.

That's something for State to remember as it decides whether to name Vietnam as a Country of Particular Concern. Hanoi was listed from 2004 to 2006, and then removed as a reward for limited liberalization. Vietnam remains the only country that has changed its laws explicitly to get itself removed from the roster. The government made it easier to register religious groups, dropped some egregious policies such as forcing believers to renounce their faith, and improved its relations with the Vatican.

The Bat Nha example exposes how prone to backsliding Hanoi is if it's not forced to follow such early steps with further progress. Now is a good time to ratchet up the diplomatic pressure again.

## How To Tackle the Question of Child Custody in Japan

EDITORIAL  
THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

When the US and European nations say that more than 100 children have been "abducted" to Japan, they are not lying.

Troubles involving children of international divorces being taken from their countries of residence by their Japanese parents and brought back "illegally" to Japan are creating an international stir.

More than 100 such cases have been filed in the US, Britain, Canada and other countries so far. Some people even accuse Japan of "encouraging child abduction."

Last month, a US citizen was arrested in Japan for attempting to snatch back his two children from his Japanese ex-wife who had returned to Japan with them in August.

The trouble occurred because of differences in the rules for dealing with children of international divorces in Japan and the US. The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, to which 81 nations are signatories, states that, in principle, when a child has been taken from his or her country of residence, the child must be returned to that country.

The convention requires the governments of signatory nations to comply.

Among the Group of Eight countries, Japan and Russia are the only non-signatories to the convention. Disputes occur frequently between citizens of signatory and non-signatory nations.

Japan is now coming under increased pressure from abroad to join the convention. John Roos, US ambassador to Japan, last Friday joined his European counterparts in urging Justice Minister Keiko Chiba to act.

Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada told a news conference, "We are approaching the matter with an open mind, but we must also take public opinion into account."

How should disputes related to child custody be resolved between divorced couples whose cultures differ and who are subject to different laws? The argu-

ment that everyone should abide by the rules of the Hague Convention carries conviction.

At present, divorced Japanese parents whose children have been taken abroad by their non-Japanese ex-spouses have no legal recourse.

The ranks of Japanese citizens marrying non-Japanese are swelling steadily, and the number tops 40,000 a year.

It is probably not realistic for Japan to continue avoiding the Hague Convention.

On the other hand, there are other issues that need working out.

The great majority of parental child abduction cases filed in North America and Europe today involve ex-wives who are Japanese. And a number of these women say they have returned to Japan with their children to escape physical abuse by their ex-husbands. How can such women

and their children be saved from their predicament abroad? This question cannot be ignored.

There are cultural and legal differences between Japan and the West. In the US, visitation rights of divorced parents are clearly defined, but they are not spelled out under the Japanese Civil Code. Joint custody is not a recognized custom in Japan, and the overwhelming tendency here is to award custody to the mother.

Furthermore, courts of law are rarely involved in forcing one parent to hand the child over to the other.

If Japan were to sign the Hague Convention now, the result could prove as ineffective as grafting a shoot onto a different kind of tree.

We must never lose sight of one fundamental principle—that each child's welfare must trump everything.

How do we respect the right of children to have a relationship with both parents after they split? This is an issue that has not been properly addressed, but it pertains to all divorces, not only international break-ups.

The time has come for Japanese society to seriously debate the welfare of children of divorced parents, in Japan and overseas.

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