

The BURMA DAILY

Volume 2 Issue 123

Wednesday, November 4, 2009

Recovering Thai Monarch Seen in Public

REUTERS

BANGKOK - Thailand's 81-year-old king appeared briefly in public on Monday to take part in a traditional ritual in the grounds of the hospital where he has been recovering from illness since mid-September.

The health of King Bhumibol Adulyadej is a source of concern since he is seen as the sole unifying figure in a politically polarized country with a long history of coups and upheaval.

Wearing a white jacket over an open, checked pink shirt, the king moved around in a wheelchair, waving and taking pictures of the hundreds of happy, kneeling Thais who gathered to wish him fast recovery.

Accompanied by Queen Sirikit, Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, members of the royal family and Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, the king spent about 15 minutes in the hospital grounds to mark the Loy Krathong festival.

With a healthier countenance than during his earlier public appearance 10 days ago, the king released a yellow float at the riverside hospital pier into the Chao Phraya River running through Bangkok.

On the Loy Krathong festival, Thais float small hand-made "rafts" on rivers or other stretches of water. By lighting a candle on the raft and sending it on its way, people symbolically get rid of all their bad feelings.

The king was admitted to hospital on Sept 19 with a fever, lung infection and lack of appetite. He had previously appeared only once in public since then, when he visited royal monuments in the hospital grounds on Oct 23.

In its last statement on his health on Friday, Oct 30, the bureau of the royal household said the king was getting "progressively better," he had regained strength and his course of antibiotics had been discontinued.

Concern about his health sparked a fall in stock prices and the baht currency on Oct 14 and 15.



Reuters

Girls prepare paper lanterns to decorate balloons during a competition in Taunggyi, the capital of the southern Shan State of Burma, late Sunday. During the annual Tazaungdaing Festival, traditionally hand-made hot air balloons are released into the air. The competition judges balloons based on beauty, altitude achieved and the amount of time they can spend in the air.

Thai Ex-Premier Tweeting From Fugitiveland

BY PATRICK WINN
GLOBALPOST

BANGKOK - To hear the Thailand's ruling government tell it, Thaksin Shinawatra is the kingdom's most meddlesome fugitive.

Since fleeing Thailand last year, the self-exiled, billionaire ex-premier has zig-zagged the globe while stirring anti-establishment supporters from afar. He has incessantly needled the ruling party through in-country proxies, sarcastic Tweet messages and Skype video calls, broadcast at political pep rallies that sometimes turn violent.

His sanctuaries have included Hong Kong, London, Liberia and Dubai. Each new hideout spurs new extradition threats from the government. But if Thaksin pulls off a visit to Cambodia—right in Thailand's backyard—the government's repeated promises to catch him may begin to appear hollow.

Many experts already suspect authorities prefer Thaksin as a fugitive rather than a prisoner.

"The best way to diminish Thaksin's popularity is not to make him a

martyr, but rather to allow him to make a fool of himself via Skype as often as he wishes," said Federico Ferrara, assistant political science professor at the National University of Singapore.

Imprisoning Thaksin, he said, would be "highly destabilizing," sparking huge rallies and endless requests for release.

Thaksin has repeatedly promised supporters he'll someday come home to Thailand. This week, the Thai government was rankled by his plans to visit the neighborhood.

At an Asean summit this week, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen went on the offense for Thaksin and publicly offered to build him a Cambodian home.

Moreover, he pondered hiring him as a political advisor and even compared him to Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and political prisoner in Burma. Thaksin, who was ousted in a 2006 military coup after five years of rule, is also a "victim" of politics, Hun Sen said.

These slights were widely inter-

preted as payback for an ongoing Thai-Cambodia land ownership dispute that has riled fierce nationalism on both sides and occasionally turned bloody. Bitterness between the countries runs even deeper, dating back to alleged Thai government sympathies to communist Khmer Rouge leaders who led mass killings in Cambodia during the 1980s.

"I don't want [Hun Sen] to be a victim or a pawn for somebody that undermines the interests of this country," said Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva at a press conference. "I'm sure that when he's better informed, he'll change his mind."

Thaksin even Tweeted his thanks to Hun Sen, who has assured the ex-premier that Cambodia will disregard extradition requests.

The powers behind the coup that toppled Thaksin in 2006, however, insist he is incorrigibly corrupt. Last year, courts sentenced him to two years in prison for using political power to secure a Bangkok land deal for his wife.

REGIONAL

Leaking Timor Sea Oil Rig Plugged

REUTERS

SYDNEY - Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production has plugged an oil well in the Timor Sea that had leaked for over two months, creating what environmentalists said was one of Australia's worst ever spills.

PTTEP, part of the Thai state-controlled energy group PTT, said in a statement yesterday it had "killed the leaking well and stopped the main fire at the Montara well head platform and surrounding the West Atlas drilling rig."

"Some material on the top side of the West Atlas rig might still be on fire but it is expected to be extinguished as the fuel source burns out," PTTEP's Australasia unit said.

A picture issued by PTTEP of the rig, owned by Norwegian driller Seadrill, showed light black smoke rising from a charred and badly damaged structure.

The rig, worth around \$200 million according to analysts at Citigroup, caught fire on Sunday during operations to stop the leak.

Between 300 and 400 barrels a day were estimated to have been leaking from the well, the Department of Resources and Energy and Tourism said on its website, and environmentalists had warned that birds and endangered sea life were at risk.

PTTEP said it plugged the leak by pumping 3,400 barrels of heavy mud down a relief well.

The West Atlas rig was due to start commercial operations this month. The Montara field could be one of the main sources of profit for PTTEP in the second half of this year as analysts expect higher output from new oil and gas fields to boost its sales.

PTTEP plans to produce about 35,000 barrels per day of oil from Montara, which should boost its 2009 sales to 240,000 bpd.

Montara is the flagship in the exploration and production business for PTTEP, which is involved in about 40 oil and gas exploration and development projects in 14 countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Citigroup noted that Seadrill had physical damage insurance and "loss of hire" insurance in place, which could limit any financial impact on the company from the incident.

By JOHN GLIONNA
LOS ANGELES TIMES

JAKARTA - The monkey, shackled to an iron stake, paced a narrow strip of dirt filled with its own excrement. As people laughed and pointed, the creature bared its teeth and lunged at the end of its line.

"He gets angry," said one trader at the teeming animal market here. "Like a little person."

Irma Hermawati gets angry too. The 31-year-old Javanese native is an investigator for the nonprofit group ProFauna, which lobbies on behalf of what she believes is Indonesia's most precious resource: its indigenous wildlife.

She spends her days plotting sting operations against well-organized poaching rings that extend across Indonesia. Wearing a traditional veil over her face, she also ventures undercover into Jakarta's riotous animal markets.

Hermawati is hunting the animal hunters.

Poaching has joined rampant logging and jungle deforestation as one of this developing nation's most pressing environmental problems. Indonesia has 230 animals on its endangered species list, and virtually every one of them can be bought here in the capital.

"It's alarming to see that Indonesia's list of protected species is getting longer, not shorter," she said. "People want medicine and exotic pets. If an animal is protected and therefore expensive, they think it gives them status to own it."

Each year, hundreds of thousands of animals are trapped and carted from the forest to supply an underground market that activists say reaps between \$10 million and \$20 million annually.

Although laws prohibit such poaching and sales, enforcement is weak and in many places nonexistent.

The hunted animals include Sumatran tigers, orangutans, cockatoos, monkeys, bats, parrots, turtles, even baby elephants, activists say. Poachers often employ crude trapping techniques that leave animals with wounds and infections that go untreated.

Cramped in crates, many animals die on the long, secretive journey to market. Some are given tranquilizers or drugs before being smuggled out of the country, where they fetch 10 times their local value.

"The problem is real and bigger than anyone realized," said Aschta

Boestani, an Indonesia expert for the Wildlife Enforcement Network of Asean.

In addition to the many creatures displayed and sold legally at markets in Jakarta and elsewhere, many vendors keep a secret list of species for customers willing to pay \$1,500 for the pelt of a Sumatran tiger or \$150 for a Javan gibbon.

"You'd be surprised what's on those lists," Boestani said. "Sun bears packed off to Japan. Tigers sent to China for medicine. Pangolins shipped to Vietnam—some of the most beautiful imperiled creatures on the planet."

Government officials admit they are fighting a losing battle. With Indonesia having little money for public campaigns and only 12,000 rangers to cover nearly 20 million hectares of dense forest, poachers often operate with impunity.

"Nobody wants to see this. People see magazine pictures of gorgeous, colorful birds and exotic animals and they ask, 'Why can't you stop this?'" said Tonny Soehartono, former director of biodiversity conservation with the Forestry Ministry.

"It comes down to money. There is a market for these animals that draws organized-crime syndicates," he said. "The jungle is a difficult place to enforce the law."

On a recent day at Jakarta's Pramuka market, thousands of bamboo cages dangled overhead—many filled with birds supposedly protected by the government—as customers and traders crowded into a maze of darkened stalls.

One vendor sought \$750 for a Balinese monkey that sat in a cramped cage, barely able to move. Nearby, two vendors demonstrated how a small wooden device inserted into the anus of a pigeon produced a whistling noise when the bird flew. Woodpeckers hammered at logs and large bats hung upside down in cages.

"Batman," the merchant said, smiling, patting the cage.

Nearby at the sprawling Jatinegara market, a baby brown eagle indigenous to Indonesia was tied to a stick, eyeing passersby with a look that seemed a mixture of fear and fury.

Hermawati first witnessed the fate of Indonesia's wildlife on mountain hikes in East Java, when she saw exotic birds trapped in tiny cages, waiting to be scooped up by poachers.

"It was cruel," she said, "and I

wanted to find out how to stop it."

She joined ProFauna in 1998 and soon relocated to Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, where she saw firsthand the extent of the urban smuggling network.

At some markets here, a deposit of just \$50 can get a customer a tiger, endangered monkey or orangutan delivered in a week.

The job is dangerous. She has received death threats. Ominous visitors have shown up at her office outside Jakarta.

What keeps her going, she said, are the successful stings that land poachers in jail—at least for a while.

At one house in Jakarta, investigators recovered 65 types of dead animals, including the skins of two Sumatran tigers and an Indonesian honey bear, along with a stuffed peacock, all of which were being readied for market.

But her strangest case came a few years ago when months of surveillance led to the arrest of a Jakarta man who had illegally kept an orangutan as a pet in his home.

The animal was sickly and overweight and had even taken up smoking cigarettes, Hermawati said.

She has caught one smuggler carrying a baby orangutan in a computer bag. Another had stuffed a rare parakeet inside a water pipe, and still another carried a small monkey in a lunch box.

But many cases end in frustration when suspects are given light sentences and do little or no jail time. "Many people still do not take this issue seriously," she said.

"Indonesia already has so many problems with its people," Hermawati said. "They ask, 'Why should we care about animals?'"

Besides going after those who smuggle endangered species, she said, activists are working to pass animal cruelty laws in Indonesia so creatures can no longer be kept in the decrepit conditions that exist in the Jakarta markets.

ProFauna faces an uphill battle. Activists say that one Forestry Ministry officer in northern Sumatra was recently found to be moonlighting as an animal smuggler.

Still, this professional hunter lives for the chase.

"I want to catch these smugglers and traders and put them out of business for good. I want to send them to prison," she said.

"They put so many animals in cages. I want them to experience for themselves what it's like to be kept in a cage."

Briefing

US Film Producer Plans Biopic on Muhammad

LONDON - Producer Barrie Osborne cast Keanu Reeves as the messiah in "The Matrix" and helped defeat the dark lord Sauron in his record-breaking "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Now the Oscar-winning US filmmaker is set to embark on his most perilous quest to date: making a big-screen biopic of the prophet Muhammad. Budgeted at around \$150 million the film will chart Muhammad's life and examine his teachings. Osborne told Reuters he envisages it as "an international epic production aimed at bridging cultures. The film will educate people about the true meaning of Islam." Osborne's production will reportedly feature English-speaking Muslim actors. It is backed by the Qatar-based production company Alnoor Holdings, who have installed the Muslim scholar Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi to oversee all aspects of the shoot. In accordance with Islamic law, the prophet will not actually be depicted on screen. "The film will shed light on the Prophet's life since before his birth to his death," Ahmed Abdullah Al-Mustafa, Alnoor's chairman, told al-Jazeera. "It will highlight the humanity of Prophet Muhammad." The as-yet-untitled picture is due to go before the cameras in 2011. (*Guardian*)

Equatorial Guinea Leader Pardons UK Mercenary

LONDON - The British mercenary Simon Mann, who was sentenced to 34 years in prison in Equatorial Guinea last year for plotting to overthrow the oil-rich country's government, has been granted a presidential pardon. Equatorial Guinea's Information Ministry said yesterday that President Teodoro Obiang had already signed the waiver, which was "a complete pardon on humanitarian grounds." Mann, a former Special Air Services officer, was arrested in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 2004 with dozens of mercenaries when their private plane landed. He spent three years in prison in Zimbabwe and was then extradited to Equatorial Guinea. During his trial, the court in Equatorial Guinea heard that Mark Thatcher, the son of the former British prime minister, was a member of the group. Mann acknowledged knowingly taking part in the attempt to topple Equatorial Guinea's government, but his lawyer argued he was a secondary player. (*Guardian*)

N Korea Says It Has Weapons-Grade Plutonium

BY MARK TRAN
THE GUARDIAN

LONDON - North Korea yesterday claimed to have completed reprocessing spent fuel rods at its Yongbyon nuclear plant to extract weapons-grade plutonium.

"We have finished reprocessing 8,000 spent fuel rods as of August. We have made substantial achievements in weaponizing plutonium from the extraction," Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Experts said North Korea might be able to produce enough material for one more atomic weapon from the fuel rods cooling at the Soviet-era plant, which was being taken apart under a disarmament-for-aid deal. The announcement is seen as a fresh attempt to put pressure on the US for direct talks.

North Korea's foreign ministry said yesterday the country would "go its own way" unless the US

agreed to its longstanding goal of bilateral talks.

Analysts say despite a recent thaw in its relations with the outside world, the latest move served to underline North Korea's threat to stay away from six-party talks on its nuclear program, and to carry out more tests of long-range missiles, as well as nuclear devices, despite sanctions imposed after the last nuclear test on May 25.

Earlier this month, Pyongyang expressed willingness to return to the six-party nuclear disarmament talks which it quit in April, on condition it first makes progress in a bilateral meeting with the US.

North Korea's latest announcement came amid speculation that the US special envoy to Korea, Stephen Bosworth, might travel to Pyongyang late this month or next month for talks to persuade North Korea to return to the six-party forum that brings together the two

Koreas, Japan, China, Russia and the US.

Ri Gun, the second highest-ranking North Korean nuclear negotiator, and Sung Kim, the US nuclear negotiator, held inconclusive talks last month.

After months of sabre-rattling, North Korea has sent more ambivalent signals since August. It has made peace overtures to Seoul and Washington, but it also test-fired short-range missiles and warned South Korea of a potential naval clash on their disputed border.

US and South Korean officials believe that North Korea will eventually come back to the negotiating table because of its weak economy and heavy dependence on international food aid. South Korean officials said the US and South Korea were developing "contingency plans" in case of the "collapse" of the North Korean regime.

One in Five Mammals on Extinction Red List

Up to 70 percent of plant species believed to be endangered

BY STEPHEN BATES
THE GUARDIAN

LONDON - A fifth of the world's known mammals, a third of its amphibians, more than a quarter of its reptiles and up to 70 percent of its plants are under threat of extinction according to the red list of threatened species, the latest annual survey compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Among the critically endangered species are the western lowland gorilla and the bactrian camel. The golden-headed lion tamarin is listed as endangered and the socorro dove is extinct in the wild. Only a single male specimen of the Rabb's fringe-limbed tree frog, which lives in central Panama, has been heard calling in the last three years and attempts to breed it in captivity have so far failed.

The IUCN estimates nearly 17,300 of the world's 47,677 known species are in danger of extinction.

Dr Ben Collier, research fellow at the London Zoological Society, whose scientists contributed to the survey, said: "We must take decisive action to reverse the serious declines we see in wildlife. We need to ensure that our enduring legacy is not to wipe out the small things that provide us with great benefits such as nutrient recycling



Reuters

Mahale, a baby Western Lowland gorilla, rests on his mother Mouila at Sydney's Taronga Zoo in May. The gorilla is among the species included on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list as being critically endangered.

and climate regulation."

Of the world's 5,490 mammal species, 79 are believed to be extinct, at least in the wild, 188 are critically endangered, 449 endangered and 505 vulnerable. Among the latter is the eastern voalavo, a rodent endemic to Madagascar, whose habitat is threatened by slash-and-burn farming methods. The Panay monitor lizard in the Philippines is endangered for the same reason, as is the sailfin water lizard whose hatchlings are sought for the pet trade.

Among amphibians, the Kihansi

spray toad of Tanzania is thought to be extinct in the wild, due to fungal disease in its habitat and the construction of a dam upstream of the Kihansi falls that has dried out its habitat. Of the 12,151 plant types on the endangered list, there are 8,500 threatened with extinction and 112 believed to be extinct.

The Queen of the Andes plant, which produces seeds only once in 80 years and then dies, is holding on, though climate change is impairing its ability to flower and cattle are trampling its young plants.

OPINION

Africa Must Attract Broad Investment, Not Rely on Handouts

BY PAUL KAGAME
THE GUARDIAN

There is a debate among geopolitical and economic commentators about the merits of Chinese versus Western involvement with Africa. One argument is that Chinese investment is exploitative and undermines the development of democracy and human rights on the continent. Others view the matter in terms of competition, arguing that China is encroaching on the decades-long monopoly of the West over Africa's natural resources.

Neither of these viewpoints addresses the core issues. First, major players in global investment and development are discussing Africa without engaging its people as equal partners. Second, Africans are not seen to be proactive in setting their own priorities and terms of engagement.

Development aid, fashioned on this skewed relationship, has long been a key source of income for the continent. While helpful, aid has not delivered sustainable development. It is clear that trade and investment bring greater opportunity for wealth creation. Africa welcomes investment, from the east and west, north and

south, and Rwanda is no exception. We want investment that offers skills and jobs, encourages entrepreneurship, and provides the opportunity to improve millions of lives.

This call for investment and trade rather than traditional aid does not mean the latter's contribution to addressing poverty is not recognized. However, the fundamental problem with the current development aid practice is the danger countries face as they become perpetually reliant on handouts.

So what should those who give aid, and those who receive it, focus on? The primary purpose of aid should ultimately be to work itself out, leaving a positive legacy behind. Aid should also be used to create opportunities for trade, enhance self-sufficiency and assist with the development of a robust private sector to attract investment. In many countries, for example, aid offers resources such as fertilizers for free. The intention is good but this often prevents local businesses from being able to provide these goods competitively. Given the choice, people would prefer to work and provide for themselves, rather than receive charity. Africans want self-determination and dignity.

Our continent, like others, requires investment to further its development. Efforts to pursue this need not be seen as a threat to the strengthening of democracy. Of course, African leaders should take good governance and human rights seriously—and most do. This is not—and should not be—because anybody else tells us to, or in return for investment, but because it is the right thing to do. The presence of Chinese investment in Africa does not discharge governments of their responsibilities any more than its presence in the European Union or US should erode human rights there.

In Rwanda, we have worked hard to tackle the root causes of corruption and ensure there is a strong case for attracting investment. This program of reform is yielding results and has been recognized by the World Bank's 2010 Doing Business Index, which saw Rwanda jump from 143rd to 67th position in one year, making it the world's leading reformer. In 2008, Rwanda's GDP grew at 11.2 percent and despite the global financial crisis our 2009 projections give us cause for optimism. Wages in key export sectors have grown

more than 20 percent annually over the last eight years, and all these developments have occurred while the percentage of our national budget funded by aid has been reduced by half since 2001.

Ultimately, Africa's relationship with its international counterparts should be redefined. For too long, we have not been able to trade fairly with Europe and the US; trade barriers and subsidies, particularly in agriculture, have protected external markets from African products, hindering our ability to trade as equals. Investment and trade with willing countries, including intra-African trade, helps the continent to build a much-needed culture of entrepreneurship and development.

All would benefit if the world focused on increasing investment in Africa, and if Rwanda and the rest of the continent worked to establish more equitable international partnerships. A trade relationship built on this new approach would be more helpful in reaching what should be our common goal: sustainable development, mutual prosperity and respect.

Paul Kagame is the president of Rwanda

Re-Elected by Default, Karzai Has a Lot To Do in His 2nd Term

EDITORIAL
THE NEW YORK TIMES

We regret the decision by Afghanistan's opposition leader, Abdullah Abdullah, to withdraw from this week's runoff election for the presidency. After President Hamid Karzai's supporters tried to steal the first-round vote, Abdullah had strong reason to mistrust the process. But Afghan voters deserved another chance. And Afghanistan's government—under assault from the Taliban and its own corruption and incompetence—desperately needed the legitimacy of a cleaner vote.

Now that Karzai has been re-elected by default, he is going to have to do everything in his power to persuade his people—and the rest of the world—that he is deserving of their trust. After the last seven years of mismanagement and corruption, that will be a hard sell.

The administration of US President Barack Obama, which had to twist Karzai's arm to get him to agree to a runoff, is going to have to twist even harder to get him to

build a viable government. Obama's characterization Monday of the Afghan election process as "messy" was, to say the least, an understatement. We hope that he and his aides are talking a lot tougher in private.

To start, Karzai must appoint a new group of ministers and provincial governors who are committed to rebuilding their country, not enriching themselves. (We hope rumors that he plans to fire the competent governor of Helmand Province, Gulab Mangal, are false.) The Interior Ministry, which oversees the corruption-plagued Afghan national

police, must be reformed. The agriculture, energy and private development agencies all need better leadership.

The Afghan people need to see their government working to protect them and improve their lives if they are going to risk their lives and resist the Taliban.

Karzai must also reach out to members of the opposition, choosing competent technocrats for senior jobs. Abdullah has ruled out joining a unity government. But the government would be stronger if some of his supporters decided to participate. We hope Abdullah is committed to

playing an active, constructive role in Afghan politics.

Karzai must—urgently—break ties with his most unsavory cronies. During the campaign, he allied himself with General Abdul Rashid Dostum, a notorious warlord whose forces have been accused of killing thousands of Taliban prisoners of war in 2001. Justice demands that General Dostum stand trial for his crimes.

Getting a credible government in place is essential. But it is only a first step. The list of policy problems that have been ignored or mismanaged is depressingly long. Karzai needs to work with the US to come up with a strategy to try to woo midlevel Taliban leaders in from the cold. The two governments need to quickly develop a plan to accelerate training of the Afghan security forces.

Karzai and the Obama administration don't have much time to get this right. The Taliban's military strength is growing by the day. The US' appetite for the Afghan war is evaporating nearly as quickly.

The BURMA DAILY

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