

# The BURMA DAILY

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## 9th Malaysian Church Hit in 'Allah' Row

BY SETH MYDANS  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

BANGKOK - A ninth church was vandalized Monday in Malaysia in a series of arson attacks that have raised religious tensions surrounding a dispute over the use of the word "Allah" by Christians in this mostly Muslim nation.

"Allah" is the common term for God in Malay-language Bibles, but the government and many Muslim groups insist that the word should be reserved for use in Islam.

The attacks, which began on Friday, came after a court ruling on Dec 31 that overturned a government ban on the use of "Allah" by Christians. That ruling has been stayed while the government appeals.

Only one of the churches has been seriously damaged, and some of the attacks were minor. In Monday's attack, the Sidang Injil Borneo Church in the central state of Negeri Sembilan was slightly damaged when its door was burned, according to local reports.

Government officials condemned the violence Monday but defended their position, saying conditions are different in Malaysia from those in neighboring Indonesia or in Arab nations where "Allah" is the common term for God.

"These outrageous incidents are acts of extremism and designed to weaken our diverse communities' shared commitment to strengthen racial unity," The Malaysian Home Ministry secretary, General Mahmood Adam, told reporters after briefing foreign diplomats on the situation.

"They don't understand the situation here," he said of the diplomats. "They just want to know why it can be allowed in other countries and not here."

The violence has strained relations among Malays, who are mostly Muslim and who make up 60 percent of the population, and the Chinese and Indian minorities, who are Christian, Hindu and Buddhist.

Indonesia is less divided, with Muslims making up 90 percent of its population of 240 million.

Some Muslims in Malaysia say they fear that Christians are trying to win converts by using the word "Allah." They say Muslim believers could be confused by the use.



Reuters

People look for precious stones in the mine dump piled by major mining companies at a jade mine in Pharkant township in Burma's Kachin state on Monday. Being abundantly rich in mineral resources, Burma produced over 30 million kilograms of jade during 2008-09, compared with over 20.23 million kilograms the year previous, according to official data.

## Indonesia Still To Act on Military Businesses

REUTERS

JAKARTA - The Indonesian government shows no inclination to end the military's involvement in business or make the powerful armed forces fully accountable to civilian authorities, Human Rights Watch said yesterday.

The New York-based group said in a report that reform of Indonesia's powerful military was a weak spot in President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's efforts to improve governance and end corruption in the world's third-largest democracy.

Foreign investors have been looking for decisive action against corruption from Yudhoyono after he won a second term last year. But the former general has moved cautiously following a power struggle between the respected Corruption Eradication Commission and the police and attorney-general's office.

In October 2004, Indonesia's parliament had issued a five-year deadline for the military to withdraw from its businesses, but Yudhoyono issued a decree five days before the expiry, postponing the date for an

unspecified period.

Human Rights Watch said Yudhoyono's government "does not intend to end the military ownership of the armed forces' businesses and the reform plans do not ensure accountability for military misbehavior in connection with business activity."

The report said the military's business operations include enterprises under military foundations and cooperatives, collaborations with the private sector and criminal activities such as illegal logging.

At the end of 2007, the military maintained 23 foundations and over 1,000 cooperatives, including ownership in 55 companies as well as leases on thousands of government properties and buildings.

Official data valued the total gross assets at \$349 million at the end of 2007 and profit from the business activities at \$29,000 during that year.

A presidential spokesman dismissed the suggestion that the government was ignoring the military's business activities and said the reform process was taking place

gradually.

"Maybe it takes time, but the government is concerned about looking into how the military can be turned into a professional force," said spokesman Julian Pasha.

The 400,000-strong military played a dominant role in Indonesian politics and businesses during the three-decade rule of autocratic president Suharto, and was accused of widespread rights abuses.

Suharto was toppled in May 1998 and died a decade later. Successive governments since then have attempted to dismantle the military's business empire, with no significant success.

HRW said reasons for the delay in ending the military's business activities include a slow process and vague regulations. The slow process has also allowed the military to liquidate some of its assets, it said. "There were also persistent rumors that the military drained companies of value, transferring assets to private allies on anticipation of an eventual handover," the report said.

## REGIONAL

## As Foreigners Scoop Up Asian Farms, Thailand Says No Way

By PATRICK WINN  
GLOBALPOST

BANGKOK, Thailand - To many tiny, overdeveloped or arid nations, Southeast Asia's jade-green fields have never looked more desirable.

Rich countries barely able to eat off their land — think Singapore or Saudi Arabia — have in recent years secured vast African or Southeast Asian farmlands to feed their people. Qataris and Saudis control millions of farmable acres in the Philippines and Indonesia. Corporate interests in Singapore just inked deals to pour \$40 million into Cambodia's largest corn plantation.

Even Burma's military junta promises via its clunky website to waive taxes for foreign investors seeking farmland.

As for Thailand? The world's leading rice exporter and one of Asia's most fertile nations? Forget it. Mere rumors of Arabs nabbing Thai rice fields through proxies has stoked a patriotic backlash and recharged Thailand's anti-colonial spirit.

"It's easy to whip up nationalist sentiment in Thailand," said Supavud Saicheua, executive director of the Bangkok-based Phatra Securities firm. "Even the specter of foreign domination gets people upset."

Even in a global food shortage, and against the advice of respected economists, Thailand appears unlikely to sell rice paddies to outsiders. To many Thais, that would be like ceding a piece of the king-

dom's soul. The paddies symbolize boundless fertility, a social safety net waiting to nourish and provide for those who've lost work elsewhere.

Thailand's proud resistance to invaders—it's the only mainland Southeast Asian nation that escaped colonization—lives on in a wall of legal barriers to foreign ownership. Foreigners are forbidden from owning Thai land, farming Thai soil or, outside of exemptions, owning a business without a Thai joint venture.

But according to a recent broadcast by the Thai PBS channel, Middle Eastern businesses secretly undermined Thai sovereignty last year by buying up rice farms through surrogates. That report set off fears that a new wave of agriculturalists has Thailand in its sights, even after a government investigation turned up no illicit proxy farms.

Foreigners are explicitly banned from agriculture through Thailand's Foreign Business Act, which also sets aside fisheries, legal services, restaurants and tourism as industries in which "Thai nationals are not yet ready to compete with foreigners."

Some experts disagree, arguing that barriers to outside competition preserve monopolies and maintain appalling inefficiencies in Thai-only sectors. Even Thai industries that are likely fit to compete with foreigners, such as the award-winning advertising sector, remain on the no-foreigners list.

"When you look at it as a sportsman, it would be like you play golf, you're a single handicap player, but you declare a handicap of 20," said Nandor von der Luehe, chairman of the Joint Foreign Chambers of Commerce in Thailand.

Politicians assume that voters will cry treason if they ever invite foreigners to compete with Thais — and outright revolt if they break down barriers to rice farming. But this most sacred of livelihoods happens to be one of Thailand's least efficient. Though roughly 43 percent of the Thai labor force works in agriculture, the sector only contributes 12 percent to the national GDP.

Thailand, preparing to export 9 million tons of rice in 2010, is unmatched as a rice exporter. But lesser-developed countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines reap far more rice per acre than Thailand, according to research by Andrew Walker, professor at Australian National University. Productivity is less than half of Asia's combined figure and ranks among the world's lowest.

"If you could put in foreign capital and consolidate land and have a bigger economy of scale, you could make those returns much higher," Supavud said. "But that triggers all sorts of anti-foreign sentiment."

One of Thailand's best-known axioms equates prosperity with having "rice in the fields and fish in the waters." But more young,

upcountry Thais are ditching family rice fields to try their luck in Bangkok. This internal migration trend is even reflected in Thai country music radio, replete with songs of struggle and success in the big city.

The "hollowing out" of able-bodied farmhands, Supavud says, is yet another drag on productivity. "The land is left to older generations," he said, "who farm in an inefficient way." A foreign-led revitalization of the farming industry, he said, might threaten Thai agricultural bosses but could improve the lives of everyday farmers.

As the world struggles with food scarcity, crowded and dry nations will likely covet Thailand's lush farmland more and more. Some economists predict that future food shortages will render this territory too valuable to squander through inefficient farming practices.

But, for now, Thai society still can't stomach foreign control of its heartland, said Duenden Nikomborirak, research director at the Thailand Development Research Institute. And the current government, held together by a loose coalition of interests, is too fragile to risk public reprisal. "Any changes to the [Foreign Business Act] would need a very strong government willing to bear a political cost," said Duenden. "And I don't see, in the near future, any government that could bear that cost."

## Beijing to Turn Disputed Pacific Islands into 'China's Hawaii'

THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

BEIJING - China's tropical southern island of Hainan, often touted as the country's answer to Hawaii, faces an image problem in becoming a true global resort due to poor service standards and a festering territorial dispute. Late last year, the government unveiled plans to turn Hainan, once a lonely place of exile, into a top international tourist destination by 2020, hoping to lure visitors with its long, sandy beaches, crystal clear seas and year-round sunshine.

Hainan's plans risk inflaming regional tensions over a group of atolls in the South China Sea, the Spratly and Paracel islands, all or parts of which are also claimed by Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. The Hainan tourism policy document mentions the Paracels and other

"uninhabited islands," but provincial Communist Party chief Wei Liucheng sought to downplay its significance. We are currently looking at concrete ways of developing tourism on the Paracels along with related departments, and will announce details when the time is right," Wei told reporters. China's claims, the broadest, cover all of the Spratly and Paracel islands and most of the South China Sea.

The sea's biggest military skirmishes occurred in 1974, when China attacked and captured the western Paracels from Vietnam, and in 1988, when China and Vietnam fought a brief naval battle near the Spratly reefs in which more than 70 Vietnamese sailors were killed.

Vietnam has already complained about China trying to promote tourism in the Paracels.

"The action above by the Chinese side is a serious violation of Vietnam's sovereignty and... creates tension and further complicates the situation," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Nguyen Phuong Nga said earlier this week. "Vietnam requires that the Chinese side bring to an end these actions."

China says its sovereignty over all the islands is indisputable.

But sovereignty isn't the only obstacle to China's building a new Maui admitted Hainan's provincial governor, Luo Baoming, due to persistent problems with tourists being ripped-off, sold fake goods or otherwise encountering lamentable service standards.

"Frankly speaking, receiving complaints like this makes you both pained and angry," Luo told a news conference in Beijing.

"It blackens the name of

tourism in Hainan," he added. "If we can't solve this issue, or can't tackle it effectively enough, we won't be able to reach even the lowest threshold for becoming an international tourist island."

Such complaints in China's tourist industry are not new, and Chinese newspapers regularly feature horror stories of tour groups dumped by the sides of roads by unscrupulous tour operators or forced to buy expensive knick-knacks.

A glance at some reader comments on official news agency Xinhua's website on Hainan's plans showed just what a problem the government has to deal with.

"Sure, Hainan has great natural conditions, but the tourist market is a mess," wrote one reader called "Clumsy Stone."

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## INTERNATIONAL

## Somali Refugees Fleeing to Yemen Potential Al-Qaida Recruits

BY SUDARSAN RAGHAVAN  
THE WASHINGTON POST

KHARAZ, Yemen - Thousands of Somali boys and teenagers fleeing war and chaos at home are sailing to Yemen, where officials who have long welcomed Somali refugees now worry that the new arrivals could become the next generation of al-Qaida fighters.

As the US deepens its counterterrorism operations in Yemen, officials are concerned that extremists could find growing Somali refugee camps fertile ground for recruiting. US and Yemeni authorities also fear that Islamist fighters from Somalia could slip into the country among the throngs of refugees, deepening ties between al-Qaida leaders in Yemen and the particularly hardline militants of Somalia.

Fleeing a failed state for a failing one, the Somali youths arrive daily in this refugee outpost, which is filled with rickety tents and tales of misery, in the vast desert of southern Yemen. They bring stories of brutality and forced conscription by al-Shabab, an Islamist force battling Somalia's US-backed transitional government.

"They ordered us to fight the nonbelievers," said Abdul Khadr Salot, 19, a burly ex-fighter with a thin scar across his cheek who escaped from a militant training camp. "Even if your father tells you to leave the Shabab, you must kill him."

But this longtime haven is becoming an increasingly inhospitable place since the US bolstered its operations here, largely in response to the Yemeni al-Qaida connections of the Nigerian man who allegedly tried to bomb a US airliner over Detroit on Christmas Day, and to the links of an extremist Yemeni American cleric to the November shootings at Fort Hood, Texas.

Yemen's fragile government fears that Somali fighters from al-Shabab will swell the ranks of Yemen's Islamist militants at a time when links between the Somali group and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula are growing, according to Yemeni officials and analysts.

As it quietly wages war against extremists in the Arabian Peninsula and parts of Africa, the administration of US President Barack Obama could find itself confronting a unified, regional al-Qaida on two continents. This would further stretch US resources as Washington fights

major conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. It could also push Yemen—beset by mounting internal strife, poor governance, extreme poverty and dwindling resources—even deeper into a downward spiral.

"Somalia for Yemen is becoming like what Pakistan is for Afghanistan," said Saeed Obaid, a Yemeni terrorism expert who wrote a book on al-Qaida's Yemen affiliate.

Leaders of al-Shabab, which the US has labeled a terrorist organization with links to al-Qaida's central body, said last week that they will send fighters to help al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. That prompted Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi to issue a stern warning through the state-run Saba news agency that Yemen will not allow "any terrorist elements from any country to operate in its territory."

In recent days, Yemeni security forces have carried out raids on Somali refugee communities, detaining suspected loyalists of al-Shabab, which means "The Youth." Overnight, an atmosphere of fear has gripped many communities, which numbers more than 1 million.

"The climate has changed, and it is heating up," Mohammed Ali, a top leader of the Somali community in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa, lamented over a glass of Somali coffee.

An estimated 74,000 African refugees, mostly from Somalia and Ethiopia, arrived in Yemen last year, 50 percent more than in 2008, according to statistics from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN-CR officials say 309 either drowned in capsized boats or were killed by smugglers.

According to Somali community leaders and officials at the UNHCR, which runs the camp here in Kharaz. Parents often say they bring their children to Yemen to prevent them from one day joining al-Shabab. "It's very easy to brainwash youth. They tell them, 'We'll give you money. We'll give you power,'" said Rocco Nuri, a UNHCR official in Aden.

When told that former al-Shabab fighters were in Kharaz, Nuri expressed concern but said it was "impossible to monitor this" in an open camp where residents come and go freely. Nevertheless, he expressed confidence that the camp is not a haven or recruiting hub for Somali militants.

In Yemen, Somalis are worse off



Reuters

Somali refugees sleep in a hut after a boat carrying them capsized off the coast of Rada area in southern Yemen on September 24, 2009.

than Yemenis. Jobs are scarce. Thousands of Somali youths eke out a living washing cars. They sleep under trees and bathe in public water tanks. Most Somali refugees view Yemen as a transit point to richer nations such as Saudi Arabia. But in recent months, a war between the Yemeni government and Shiite Hawthi rebels in the north has stemmed the migration.

Salafist schools, which teach a puritanical brand of Islam, have attracted several hundred young Somali refugees with offers of free food and lodging, said Somali community leaders. They fear some could join al-Shabab.

"Some boys did return back to Somalia," said Deka Muhamed, a Somali elder in Sana. "We've heard they've been killed, but we don't know how or why."

Yemeni officials, meanwhile, worry that al-Qaida could lure Somali ex-fighters into their ranks with promises of money or aid. But so far, there has been no evidence of this, say Western diplomats and Yemeni officials.

In an audiotape last year, Osama bin Laden exhorted al-Shabab to overthrow the Somali government. Radical Yemeni American cleric Anwar al-Aulaqi, whom the US has linked to the suspect in the attempted Christmas Day bombing and to the gunman charged in the massacre at Fort Hood, has also expressed support for al-Shabab.

Yemeni officials and analysts say there is regular communication between al-Qaida militants in Yemen and al-Shabab. Last week, Somalia's state minister for defense declared that Yemeni militants had

sent al-Shabab two boats filled with arms. They have also traveled to Somalia to fight.

"Some elements went to Somalia. Some were killed there," said Rashad al-Alimi, Yemen's deputy prime minister for security and defense.

Foreign Minister Qirbi, in an interview before the failed Christmas Day attack, urged Western nations to provide greater support for Yemen's coast guard to protect its shores from militants entering or leaving. "We also need better surveillance of refugees in the country," he said.

Many Somali refugees refuse to leave their houses at night, fearing they will be picked up in a security sweep. "Nobody carries a Shabab ID. It's not written on our foreheads," said Ali, the community leader. "We have all become suspects."

Most Somalis, he noted, practice a moderate form of Islam that stresses tolerance.

At the Somali Refugee Council office in Sana, more than 20 refugees have reported losing their jobs in the past week, said Mohamed Abdi Gabobe, its chairman. The council, he said, is planning a demonstration to show solidarity with Yemen, in the hopes that this will lessen the pressure on the community.

But many refugees are worried about their futures. They say that they have become the latest victims in the US counterterrorism campaign.

"When two elephants fight each other, it is always the grass that is destroyed," said Sadat Mohamed Yusuf, a Somali community leader. "We are the grass."

## OPINION

## India-China Rivalry Is Not Characterized Simply By Antagonism

BY STANLEY WEISS  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Last fall, a rare opinion poll was conducted across China. It asked a simple question: What do you perceive as the greatest threat facing China? The range of answers was interesting—but even more interesting was the way the survey was reported in India.

Among Indian newspapers, the thrust of the stories said that 40 percent of the Chinese polled think India presents the greatest security threat after the US. Yet Indian business journals emphasized that 60 percent of Chinese saw no threat from India. The Indian Business Standard explained that while India was seen in China as the second-biggest threat, 6 in 10 Chinese citizens didn't mention India at all—a reflection of the broader concerns of a wealthier populace.

The contradictions come as no

surprise—India is a kaleidoscope of competing realities. But as China and India begin preparations to mark 60 years of diplomatic ties, that same schizophrenia has come to characterize their bilateral relations.

Where does the heart of the relationship between the dragon and the elephant lie?

Right now, the answer seems to be both. "Indians generally agree that we must have excellent economic and diplomatic relations with China, but we must also keep our powder dry," Vice Admiral AK Singh, the former chief of India's Eastern Naval Command, told me. "We feel our foreign policy must be backed by sufficient power—a steel fist in a velvet glove."

Whether the future of this relationship is fashioned in velvet or forged in steel, three truths are emerging.

First, China seems committed to a vision of a multipolar world,

but a unipolar Asia. It is no accident that China's posture toward India hardened in 2006. Just days after the US and India unveiled a defense framework and then a nuclear agreement, China's ambassador to New Delhi began referring to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as "Southern Tibet," a provocation not heard since the two nations fought a 32-day war over the territory in 1962.

Second, India seems determined not to be pushed around by China. Since 2006, India has beefed up its border security, reiterated its border claims, and deported thousands of unskilled Chinese workers. It also has deepened support for the Dalai Lama, welcoming him to an historic Buddhist monastery in Tawang last fall, despite Beijing's protests. Rather than weakening India's resolve, Chinese intransigence may be strengthening it.

Third, it is in America's interests

to maintain good relations with both nations. After US President Barack Obama's travels to China and the Indian prime minister's state visit to Washington, the joke in New Delhi was that "China gets an agreement, Pakistan gets funding, and India gets a nice dinner." With China acting as America's banker, it would seem, as a prominent Indian diplomat said to me, that "for the foreseeable future, the US is unlikely to act as a countervailing power to China, and India will have to look after its interests the best it can. But there is also a sense that the US will recover, and its passivity toward China will be temporary."

"The truth is," a high-ranking US State Department official told me, "both India and China have important roles to play in the emerging global architecture."

*Stanley Weiss is the founding chairman of Business Executives for National Security.*

## Taking the Measure of Obama's Foreign Policy in His First Year

BY ELIOT COHEN  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

If the first year of US President Barack Obama's foreign policy were a law firm in Charles Dickens's London, it would have a name like Bumble, Stumble and Skid.

It began with apologies to the Muslim world that went nowhere, a doomed attempt to beat Israel into line, utopian pleas to abolish nuclear weapons, unreciprocated concessions to Russia and a curt note to the British to take back the bust of Winston Churchill that had graced the Oval Office. It continued with principled offers of serious negotiation to an Iranian regime too busy torturing, raping and killing demonstrators, and building new underground nuclear facilities, to take them up. Subsequently Beijing smothered domestic coverage of a presidential visit but did give the world the spectacle of the US commander in chief getting a talking-to about fiscal responsibility from a Communist chieftain.

The lovely town of Copenhagen staged not one, but two humiliations: the first when the Olympic Committee delivered the bad news that the president's effort to play hometown booster had failed utterly, before he even landed back in the US; the second when the Chinese once again poked the US in the eye by sending minor officials to meet with Obama, as they tried to shoulder

him out of cozy meetings aimed at sabotaging his environmental policy.

It was nonetheless a year of international displays of presidential ego, sometimes disguised as cosmic modesty ("I do not bring with me today a definitive solution to the problems of war"), but mainly of one slip after another. The decision to reinforce our military in Afghanistan came after an excruciating dither that undermined the confidence of our allies. Obama's loose talk of withdrawal beginning in 18 months then undid much of the good in his decision to send troops.

Some of these follies stemmed from the inevitable glitches of a new administration settling in—the foreign-policy equivalent of the White House social secretary failing to keep party crashers out. Some of them resulted from sheer naivete, much from the puerile vendetta Obama waged against the previous administration's

record, a bad rhetorical habit that fogged the brains of people who should know better. One hopes that his advisers, and the president himself, recognize the weight of the query reportedly posed last April by the most formidable contemporary leader of a free country, Nicolas Sarkozy: "Est-il faible?" (Is he weak?). If a year from now world leaders think the answer is "yes," the US will be in deep trouble.

In at least one way, Obama resembles his predecessor: He has enormous self-confidence. But where former US President George W Bush's certainty stemmed from moral conviction, Obama's arises from a sense of intellectual superiority. Given the centrality of his intelligence to his own self-perception, how might he use it to redeem a record of, at the moment, fairly unrelieved failure?

There are large questions that require some high intellectual effort that he might consider tack-

ling. The first is explaining to the American people, and indeed to the world, what kind of war we are waging against Islamist movements. Neither Obama nor the predecessor he still complains of have been able to get beyond the trope of "extremists who have perverted a great religion." JK Rowling has given her readers a more thorough understanding of Lord Voldemort than the West's leaders have given their populations of whom we fight, what really animates them, and what the challenges that lie ahead will be. In particular, Obama has not articulated an effective policy of dealing with enemies who are neither criminals nor soldiers. Instead, he has tried to walk down both sides of a street at once, trying some in courts and keeping others in Guantanamo for handling by military tribunals.

Obama needs to say something considerably more serious. In the case of Iran, for example, he could make it altogether unambiguous that we stand with those risking their lives to confront and, if fortune favors them, overthrow a dangerous, indeed evil regime.

It's a large agenda, but then, Obama likes to give speeches. And it still leaves plenty—articulating the need for and meaning of US primacy, for example—for 2011.

*Eliot Cohen was counselor of the Department of State from 2007 to 2009.*

### The BURMA DAILY

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