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The Australian Mekong Resource

Centre was established at the University of Sydney in 1997 to promote research, discussion and debate on development and environment issues in the Mekong Region. The AMRC is a focal point for information, dialogue and activities in support of an equitable and sustainable development path for the Mekong Region.

The *Mekong Update & Dialogue* provides:

- lead article on the key topic of the issue
- responses to the lead article
- news of current developments in the region
- news from the AMRC
- information on Mekong-related conferences and events in Australia

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EDITORIAL - Burma: Isolation and engagement

What to do about Burma is one of the most intractable issues facing those concerned about rights, justice and human well-being. At the heart of the dilemma lies the basic question: is isolation of the regime, and possibly even further isolation of its victims, preferable to an engagement that may or may not see some material benefits flowing through to the poor and may or may not see incremental regime change - and may either prolong or shorten the regime's hold on power?

Debates on this basic issue come from many corners of the world and are in part shaped geographically. Thus our lead author contrasts and takes issue with what he sees as a fundamentalist North American and European (although he is European himself) isolation versus a more pragmatic ASEAN policy of "constructive engagement". He is supported in this position by our Thai contributor, who has worked at the grassroots level in northern Burma, monitoring community development projects. In contrast, the two Australian-based pieces, one by an Australian activist-academic and one by a Burmese exile, strongly oppose engagement and see even humanitarian aid as futile and a means of further propping up the regime.

Ironically, part of the intractability of the situation is the "prisoner's dilemma" within which sanctions only make sense if they are universally applied. Even our strongest critic of engagement attests to this point in his comment on the comparison with South Africa's apartheid regime. So, in a sense this puts agencies that work with NGOs in health, education and other humanitarian areas in an even more difficult position, when Realpolitik has Thailand - not to mention China - actively trading, investing and otherwise engaging with the regime.

What all the authors agree on is the heinous nature of the Burmese regime and the need to find authentic voices of resistance and leadership that represent the public interest in Burma and, more immediately, the interests of the poor and marginalised majority. The difficulty is that the regime remains so firmly entrenched, and its tentacles are so comprehensively spread through Burma's central and local governmental institutions, universities and other places where assistance would normally be channelled and civil society normally be expected to develop, that it takes a big leap of faith to expect an emergent middle class liberalism to convert economic assistance into social justice and better governance.

READER CONTRIBUTIONS

The Mekong Update & Dialogue welcomes the comments of its readers on issues raised in the Feature article and in the Responses to the Feature. If you do wish to make comment please email us at mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au. Comments should be sent by late January and should be limited to 1-2 paragraphs.

FEATURE

Promoting political change in Burma

by Joern Kristensen

In late September, three prominent Republican members of the US Senate called on the Global Fund to fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria to stop funding to the government in Burma. What had called the Senators into action was a modest \$2.4 million pledge by the Fund to fight the escalating HIV/AIDS problem. This action followed a decision by the US Congress a few months earlier to renew the tough sanctions it imposed on Burma in 2003. And sanctioning Burma's generals into complying with western standards of democracy and human rights is a permanent item on the agenda when foreign ministers of the European Union meet. Calls for more sanctions were also part of the EU statement prior to the recent ASEM meeting in Hanoi when Burma was admitted as a member.

It appears as if the EU and the US cannot get enough of it. And it appears that their strategies are terribly wrong. Not only does it seem that the sanctions, despite new doses being added, still have no noteworthy impact on the current hold on power of military rulers, but much more serious is the knowledge that imposing sanctions defies humanitarian decency and places additional burden on the poorest and most vulnerable segment of the population. The sanctions, banning imports from and investments in Burma and discouraging tourists from visiting the country, are not only keeping tens of thousands out of employment. They also demonstrate a continued failure to understand that without dialogue involving the military government, the Burmese people will continue to live in misery. Overseas pro-democracy and human right-groups have managed to successfully create a high-tech political movement, which now claims the purity seldom found in international politics anywhere in the world, leaving no room for American Congressmen and women, EU and other (Australian and Japanese) politicians to act with the level of pragmatism required in politics. But one should not be mistaken. Success in creating an environment which provides no room to find a position from which to move forward comes at the expense of the Burmese people who continue to suffer.

It is a well-established argument within political science that a strong middle class, as a result of economic expansion, is a necessary though not the only, prerequisite for sustainable democracy. In the South-East Asia region to which Burma belongs, Thailand and Indonesia are examples of how foreign aid over the years has affected the progression towards democracy, with a shift in the balance in favor of civilian governments and an acceptable positioning of the military in society. The doctrine applied to Burma has been different: Economic starvation through boycotts and trade embargoes in the hope that it would lead to political changes from within. But it is difficult to find any historical evidence to support the idea that boycott and isolation leads to democracy. The usual reference to South Africa as an example ignores the fact that South Africa already was a highly industrialized country, highly dependent on international trade, with a large middle class that felt the effects of the sanctions and was in a position to contribute to pressure for political and social change. Burma does not have these

features. The near absence of a middle class in Burmese society means that the rulers are less susceptible to similar pressure. The international trade that keeps Burma afloat, especially with China and Thailand, is not impacted by the US and EU policy. The weight of sanctions applied in South Africa does not carry equal impact in the Burma case. For sanctions to work at all in the near subsistence economy in Burma, unified actions by ASEAN, China, the European Union and the United States would be required. And that is not realistic at a time when China, India and Thailand are increasing their economic cooperation with the country.

In this light, it is not likely that new sanctions imposed by the US Congress and the EU will have any more impact on the current rulers than those that have been imposed in the past. What can be seen, though, is that the most vulnerable segment of the population continues to carry the additional burden of these sanctions, while the military maintains its own supply system and usually relies on support from China to offset the impact of western impositions. The escalation of the economic crisis brought on by the closing of the many garment factories in 2003 has forced more young women into prostitution, increasing the risk of new cases of HIV and AIDS beyond the UN estimate of 530,000 in 2000. According to US State department figures, more than 40,000 garment workers lost their jobs in and around Yangon in 2003 as a consequence of sanctions by the US.

If the international community genuinely wishes to help the Burmese population, other ways of approaching the issue of bringing a more acceptable standard of political development to Burma are required. In the current highly polarized Burma debate, there are only losers. There is no political progress, but more importantly the deadlock is directly contributing to a worsening situation for millions of people. The fact that Burma is ranked as country number 132 in UNDP's Human Development Index (2004) speaks volumes of high child mortality rates, low school enrolment, short life expectancy, etc.

Currently, the parties that must together find the formula for a more inclusive political system are locked in their separate positions from which it is hard to find an exit. This is where external help is mostly required: to support and encourage the process of negotiation, while maintaining the international denouncement of violations of universally accepted human rights that take place in the country.

The members of the international community now promoting sanctions as a mean to achieve change all have strong democratic institutions and none of them have any strategically political interests in Burma. These countries could play a leading role as donors of humanitarian assistance and institutional capacity building and, thus, through the removal of some economic pressure, create good will and more space for political maneuverability for the opposing partners to solve the conflict and develop a greater level of trust and political will. Since the middle of the 1990s Burma has received only about USD 50-100 million per year in ODA - just 1-2 dollars per capita. In 1997 Cambodia and Laos received USD 71 and USD 37 per capita. As two of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, Burma's needs are stark in contrast.

Choosing cooperation over punishment may not be an easy scenario to accept with the military involved as one of the parties. However, Aung San Suu Kyi, influential Secretary

General of NLD and Nobel laureate, has on more than one occasion stated that NLD is not against foreign aid as such, as long as it is properly monitored and distributed equally to all those in need, irrespective of their political views. And, according to the Brussels-based think-tank, the International Crisis Group (ICG), headed by the former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans, the international community does not face a choice between promoting political change on the one hand and supporting social development on the other. Both strategies, says ICG, would have to be an integral part of any genuine effort to help Burma and promote stability and welfare for its 50 million people, as well as for the Southeast Asia region as a whole being affected by the cross-boundary issues of refugees, narcotic drugs and HIV/AIDS. ICG recommends that the international community provide more aid, that the UN mandate in the country be expanded, and that international donors establish an aid consortium to monitor aid distribution and program implementation in conjunction with the application of other political tools. ICG does not dismiss sanctions and other negative reactions but recommends that they are wielded with due consideration for their humanitarian and human rights effects.

For those who sincerely wish to help the Burmese people there is nothing to lose. The results of almost fifteen years of isolation and sanctions should be enough evidence to prove that this strategy has not brought Burma closer to democracy. Instead the increasing poverty proves how it has negatively affected the lives of the very people it was meant to help.

Joern Kristensen currently holds the post as Country Director of an International NGO in Sri Lanka. He is former head of the Mekong River Commission and UN Representative in Myanmar and Vietnam.

RESPONSES TO FEATURE

Comments

by Ratana Tosakul-Boonmathya

Kristensen has pointed out a very important issue on how to promote political changes in Burma. It is true that tough sanctions by the EU and US on the Burmese government still have no remarkable impact on the current hold on power of military rulers, but much worse is that those strategies have placed extra burdens on the poorest and most vulnerable section of the population, especially those living in the war-affected zones across the country. I utterly agree with the author that these international strategies are wrong, as they keep millions of people in Burma out of jobs. The majority continue to live in misery and poverty. This is not a scenario where international agencies have to choose between supporting democracy or development in Burma. If properly targeted, long-term international humanitarian and development assistance can greatly contribute to rebuilding devastated rural communities in Burma and help reconstruct democracy from below.

Over the past few years, I have been invited to do monitoring and evaluation of several community development projects in

many war-torn zones run by NGOs in Burma. From discussion with several local community development project leaders and participants, I have learnt that international support has greatly enabled them to rebuild their lives, families and communities, which have been ruined for the past fifty years due to long term internal political conflict and civil war. By working with local communities, international agencies can provide humanitarian and long-term development assistance, in ways which empower most needy people from the grassroots level. These efforts have obviously helped strengthen their human capital and local capacities for peace and sustainable development in the long run.

By the 1990s, as a partial result of the ceasefire process in Burma, civil society groups began to organize local communities to implement community development projects in several previously armed conflict affected areas. By supporting these initiatives and efforts of local civic groups and NGOs in development work, several most needy people at the grassroots level have benefited a great deal. They began to gradually organize themselves through project participation, cooperation and networking. Their local capacities to cope with local community needs and problems are thus strengthened. This process helps foster an emergence of local NGOs to do development work. I believe this is a prerequisite for peace and eventually sustainable democracy from below.

After ceasefires, many problems of war-affected communities still remain. Improvements in the living conditions of local people in those areas all over Burma are urgent, if the ceasefire process is to be sustained, and the benefits of peace shared by all. The reconstruction of war-affected communities and economies is an essential component of broader conflict resolution efforts leading towards democracy and economic improvement in Burma.

In my view, political change from below is more sustainable than from the top where the majority are generally left out from participating in the process of political change and from reaping the benefits of such change. As a leader of an ethnic group in Burma said, *“people in this country are yearning for democracy. We have asked the government. But it seems to no avail. We do not need to wait for it any longer. We can begin rebuilding our society now through our community development efforts. People in many war-torn zone areas urgently need shelters, food, education, hospitals and job opportunities.”*

Obviously, many problems in the war-torn zone areas are common across the country. A large number of local people, particularly women and children, are also subjected to various human rights abuses and sexual violence. They generally lack access to a wide range of resources and basic services. In the end, support for local devastated people is of limited value. To move on to a sustainable peace-building process in Burma, humanitarian and development agencies need to address underlying structures of violence, inequality and injustice affecting many millions at the grassroots level. Also, the reconstruction of a post-ceasefire situation needs to be addressed at the national level – the provision of rules and laws for ensuring basic human security and good governance. Certainly, political change only from above will not be sustained, for it has to be accompanied by grassroots democratization and local participation.

As many international agencies are unwilling to channel their funds directly through the Burmese government, supporting the implementation of various development projects run by civil society groups is an appropriate alternative means to lessen poverty and strengthen local initiatives and capacities for peace and sustainable development. Kristensen is right to point out that those who sincerely wish to help the Burmese people need not to choose between democracy or development in Burma. Both are intertwined. More aid should be provided to reconstruct local devastated communities and help poor, needy people in Burma. Also, an aid consortium should be established to monitor aid distribution and program implementation in conjunction with other international political strategies.

Dr. Ratana Tosakul-Boonmathya is an anthropologist from the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development, Mahidol University, Thailand.

Promoting political change in Burma: through engagement?

by Thiha Thura (pseudonym)

As a Burmese exile living in a third country I have firm views regarding the imposition of economic sanctions on the military regime as opposed to “engagement” – whether it be “constructive engagement”, “targeted engagement”, or whatever. I am also very much aware of the hardships that the majority of ordinary people have to endure if economic sanctions were to be imposed on the near subsistence economy of Burma. However, being Burmese I realise that the majority of the Burmese can endure sanctions even if they make their lives difficult. Historically, the Burmese people have endured a great deal and these hardships are small by comparison to those of the past.

Most of us who call for sanctions against the military regime in Burma have no intention of using sanctions as punishment. The one clear objective of these sanctions is to place the military regime on notice that it cannot continue to ignore the aspirations of the people and it must resolve the political stalemate in Burma through dialogue and other peaceful means.

I disagree with the suggestion that there is no historical evidence to support the idea that boycott and isolation lead to democracy. South Africa is a clear example where the “constructive engagement” with the apartheid regime failed and it was economic sanctions that finally brought the release of Nelson Mandela and the dawn of a new era in the country. The critical difference between South Africa and Burma, as some suggest, is not that South Africa already was a highly industrialised country, highly dependent on international trade, with a large middle class that felt the effects of the sanctions and was in a position to pressure for political and social change. It was more because, unlike Burma, the sanctions imposed on South Africa were “universal”.

In Burma’s case, if the United Nations (and to an extent her representatives in Burma) were not “impotent” the people in Burma would have some hope that their aspirations could be realised. However, the anaemic way in which the United Nations

operates, has failed the people of Burma just it has failed to stop the atrocities in Rwanda. If the economic sanctions imposed on Burma were not just by a few countries, such as the United States and the EU, it would not have been possible for former foreign minister U Win Aung to remain intransigent and to state that: “They will do whatever they like and we in our country will steadfastly do what is right for our country regardless of whatever actions they take.”

Despite the call for economic sanctions by the Burmese people, other Southeast Asian countries have paid very little heed, just as they do to those UN resolutions passed on Burma each year. As long as there is profit to be made, countries and companies with little or no moral integrity will not hesitate to do business with the military regime.

It does not matter whether the regime is legitimate or not. It does not matter whether the trade is fair or not either. However, one has to ask why, despite a few instances, the majority of investors are not investing long term and some have even pulled out completely? According to a well-known Burmese economist:

“It is not the existence of democratic opposition inside and outside Burma that make the country unpalatable for foreign investors to put on long term investment. It is the way the country is governed and the atmosphere in which businesses operate that make businesses risky, costly, uncertain. Neither of the factors have much to do with effects of not being granted aid and assistance. Keeping one’s house in order so that foreign investors will be willing to invest is sometimes one’s own government could do and must do for market opening to take full effect”.¹

One has to remember that there were no economic sanctions imposed on Burma when the military took over power in 1962. Assistance and loans of all sorts were given to the then regime. Despite those loans and assistance the lives of ordinary Burmese people had been heading down the slippery slope from bad to worse. If one were to argue that any economic sanction imposed on Burma now “defies humanitarian decency and places additional burden on the poorest and most vulnerable segment of the population”, I would like to ask him or her: “Which way are your fingers pointing?” There is such a thing as “guilt by association”.

1 Quotation from the Burmese economist U Khin Maung Kyi’s unpublished article on the Burmese military regime’s so called “market economy”.

Promoting political change in Burma: a response to Joern Kristensen

by Alison Vicary

There is no disagreement that Burma is an economic and humanitarian disaster, but this crisis is not the result of parties being ‘locked in their separate positions from which it is hard to find an exit’, sanctions, un-compromising politicians or ‘high tech political movement, which claims the purity seldom found in international politics’. The crisis is the result of policies implemented by an ignorant, incompetent, backward and bloody minded military regime. The printing of money has created an

inflation rate that is at a minimum of 24%. Price increases mean that people can not afford to feed themselves properly. High levels of inflation also make investment in productive activity much more risky, lowering output and employment. Secondly, the forced procurement of some agricultural output at below market prices, apart from being theft, lowers output and employment. Thirdly, the bans on, or the regime's monopoly control over, the export or import of certain goods not only lowers output and employment, but results in a redistribution of resources away from farmers towards the military elite. An individual farmer or trader can not carry a bag of rice across the border into Thailand to earn a small profit to feed their family. However, a trader with the right connections can engage in large volume trade. Fourthly, the policy of enlarging an army that is fiscally unsustainable and then allotting the battalions areas of control, enabling them to steal land, output, goods and services, and impose high and arbitrary levels of taxation, only lowers output and employment (not to mention encouraging human rights violations). Fifthly, the 'rip it out of the ground', sell it off mentality and then don't even bother to invest it in anything not only has long run environmental problems, but also has implications for long-run economic productivity. Sixthly, the continual erratic changes in policy create an uncertain economic environment limiting investment. The policies of the regime are not only economically inept, but their ineptitude is subject to regular variation.

Aid is not implemented in an economic, political and social vacuum. It is not just delivered to the doorsteps of the vulnerable. International development agencies such as NGOs and UN agencies champion themselves as the last ditch band aid to countries in crisis. Almost gone are the pious hopes of aid to government, but some in the rich world hold out the idea that our money and expertise will assist when all else seems hopeless. However, the evidence strongly shows that aid does not work in countries, such as Burma, which are ineptly, incompetently and brutally governed. For aid to be in any sense beneficial governments must be willing to change and be in the process of implementing reasonable political and economic policies. Otherwise aid is at best a pointless exercise, disappearing down a very deep black hole. There is no shortage of examples and this includes resources destined for education, health and the most vulnerable. There are no historical examples of aid being successfully used as a lever to progress democracy when the 'government' shows no inclination to accept change. Even aid policies designed to improve the so called hope-less parts of the world, need to have their claims assessed.

Unlike direct aid to government, the impact of NGOs and UN agencies on the most vulnerable has been subject to less critical assessment. One of the reasons for this is the limited 'real' information that is publicly available on NGO and UN projects. Rousing statements issued by the implementing organization are not evidence of success. Whilst the World Bank and the IMF are often criticized, many UN agencies and NGOs manage to escape criticism. However, the latter and their representatives do not actually represent anyone and are less stringent in demanding that non-performing governments enact the modicum of reasonable policies. Every organization is self interested and this includes the management and workers in NGOs and UN agencies. These interests may not coincide with the interests of the recipients of their projects. Aid agencies may be more interested in maximizing the number of people receiving or being

involved in their projects; or maximizing their budget or revenue; or the market share of the organization. None of these are necessarily the same as maximizing the benefits to the most vulnerable.

Aid involves the transfer and transformation of resources, hopefully into a form that is useful or beneficial to the most vulnerable. This transfer and transformation of resources into a beneficial form is problematic in any country beset by corruption, nepotism and a limited regard for human rights. Burma also has an additional disadvantage in that its institutions are monopolized by a military with a little interest and capacity to promote the public good. Unfortunately, these problems are not uncommon in poor countries. However, the SPDC is not just a government beset by problems of corruption and ineptitude. It is at the heart of a system, where incentives structures exist only to garner resources for the military elite, for self-enrichment and the maintenance of control.

Aid agencies are not accountable to the people of Burma in general or to the most vulnerable. In any semi/democratic country the production of a public good usually involves some process, certainly never perfect and often highly flawed, that allows the preferences of interested parties to be elicited. This might include local elections and governance mechanisms to ensure some accountability. If the public good or policy to be introduced is controversial there may be independent impact assessments; interested groups and parties may present their opinions and make submissions. Debate can occur in the media and protests for and against policies are permissible. People can petition, leaflet and participate in other mechanisms to promote debate. However, aid projects even in more open societies than Burma are never subject to the same amount of scrutiny. Debate is not possible in Burma. There are no rights to organize – local villagers can not even call a meeting to discuss possible projects, air objections, desires or even give consent. There is no open media where individuals or groups can voice their dissent. When these mechanisms do not exist resources will not be transferred and transformed in an efficient and fair manner. Rather, resources will be directed to those that control Burma's institutional framework (and have the guns), and their sycophants.

Alison Vicary is an Associate Lecturer in the Department of Economics at Macquarie University, Sydney.

NEWS FROM THE REGION

Refugee exodus from Vietnam into Cambodia

In April protests by ethnic minority peoples - collectively labelled “montagnards” - over religious repression and land rights erupted in the central highlands of Vietnam. Since then there has been a stepping up of Vietnamese security force presence in the region, causing more people to flee. The authorities have denied that any security drive is occurring and claim that everything is normal. Large numbers of ethnic minority peoples have been crossing into Cambodia, but the government there is unwilling to accept them as refugees, arguing that they are in fact economic migrants. UNHCR says that not all refugees are fleeing persecution and many wrongly believe that the UNHCR will help them reclaim confiscated lands in Vietnam. There are some 553 ethnic minority refugees under UNHCR protection in Cambodia at present.

- 2004 “Authorities in Vietnam’s restive central highlands ramp up security”, Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 26 October 2004
- 2004 “U.N. says it is unable to help Vietnamese hill people reclaim confiscated lands”, The Associated Press, 5 November 2004

HIV-AIDS in Vietnam and Cambodia

In the whole of Vietnam, 83,400 HIV-AIDS carriers had been detected by August, 13,124 of these developing into full-blown AIDS. There had been 7,455 deaths from the disease.

Vietnam has been tackling its HIV-AIDS problem through a combination of preventative measures, community health care and the purchase and production of medicines. Over the past two years an HIV-AIDS awareness project has been underway in five provinces and cities. The project has been giving advice on preventative measures to prostitutes and others, and offering health care consultancy to HIV-AIDS carriers. Hanoi has been particularly active in providing preventative education and consultancy services. The city has detected 6,757 carriers and had recorded 680 deaths from the disease as at the end of July. The vast majority of HIV-AIDS carriers were in the 20-39 age bracket and most had acquired the disease through drug injection.



2001 World AIDS Day parade, Koh Kong, Cambodia (Photo: CARE Cambodia)

The HIV-AIDS situation in Cambodia is much more grim. Cambodia has the highest prevalence rate in Asia (2.6% in 2002), although there has been a decline from the 1997 peak. Transmission is often from prostitute-husband-wife-child. Health care services are very poor: only one in five of the 25,000 HIV-AIDS sufferers facing death within a year is likely to receive palliative care.

- 2004 “Vietnam anti-HIV/AIDS programme ‘raises awareness’”, BBC Monitoring International Reports, 8 August 2004
- 2004 “Vietnam reports over 83,400 HIV carriers”, Xinhuanet, 22 September 2004
- 2004 “Aids, the new killer in the fields”, The Observer, 17 October 2004

NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

AMRC organised two half-day panels at the bi-annual conference of the Southeast Asian Geography Association (SEAGA), which was held in Khon Kaen 29 November – 2 December 2004:

- The first panel was on the theme of water governance, looking at the ways in which governance is shaped by and embedded in different country contexts. It involved the full AMRC team working on a joint research project supported by AusAID’s Australian Water Research Facility (Phil Hirsch, Fiona Miller, Andrew Wyatt, Naomi Carrard) and was attended by about 30 conference participants including those involved in the Mekong Learning Initiative.
- The second panel was an MLI activity and involved teachers from each of nine higher education institutions discussing a number of aspects of “a pedagogy of the Mekong”. These aspects included different perspectives on the Mekong based on location and country contexts; different approaches to field and classroom teaching; different approaches from critical social science to agro-ecosystem analysis; and the range of modes of community involvement at the different universities.

Phil Hirsch spent some days at National University of Laos in late October working with staff on field aspects of the continuing research training program in community based natural resource management. He also visited Phnom Penh, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to assist with a review of the Economy and Environment Program for Southeast Asia in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

Natalia Scurrah and Emily Hunter have been continuing their work as Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development at Ubonratchathani University and National University of Laos respectively. Both are working with local staff to help establish resource centres and to develop deeper regional linkages through the Mekong Learning Initiative. Meanwhile, Gary Lee is working with the Foundation for Ecological Recovery in Thailand and helped to organise a regional conference on Natural Resource Management and Cooperation Mechanisms in the Mekong Region, held in Bangkok 15-17 November 2004.

Phil Hirsch, Fiona Miller, Naomi Carrard, Andrew Wyatt, Nattaya Tubtim, Sarah Mecartney and Jeff Nielson have been conducting interviews in Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Australia, Indonesia and Vanuatu for the project “Water governance in

context: issues for development assistance". Preliminary summary theme and case study papers have been posted on the AMRC website for the recent workshop held at the SEAGA conference in Khon Kaen (http://www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au/events/past/GeogConference2004/water_overview.htm).

UPCOMING EVENTS

An International Conference on DELTAS

10-16 January 2005, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Contact: Dr. Yoshiki Saito, IGG, Geological Survey of Japan/AIST, Central 7, Higashi 1-1-1, Tsukuba, 305-8567, Japan

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Conference: Contemporary Research on Pre-Angkor Cambodia

10-12 January 2005, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Contact: Center for Khmer Studies, Siem Reap, Cambodia
<http://www.khmerstudies.org/events/preangkor.htm>

International Conference: "Trans-border Issues in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region"

16-20 February 2005, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand

Contact: Surasom Krisnachuta, Mekong Sub-region Social Research Center (MSSRC) Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Warinchamrap, Ubon Ratchathani 34190, Thailand

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<http://www.ubu.ac.th/%7Emssrc/html/index.php?newlang=thai>

IV MMSEA Conference

April 2005, Sapa, Lao Cai, Vietnam

www.ikap-mmsea.com

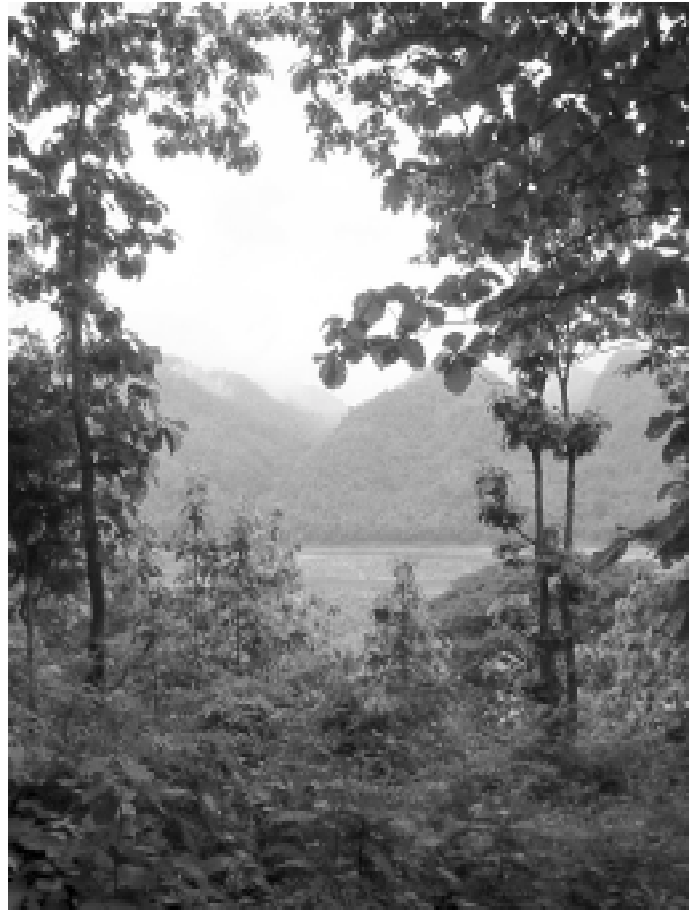
<http://www.emwg.org.vn>

The events listed above are changed with each issue of Mekong Update & Dialogue. For a complete list of upcoming events please go to our website at www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au. For submission of new events please contact the AMRC Administrator at mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au

The Salween River along the Thai-Burma border



A farmer harvesting peanuts along the Salween riverbank. (Source: TERRA)



Teak forests along the Salween River in Salween National Park. The proposed Lower Salween Dam will flood these forests which represent one of the few remaining fertile teak forests in the world. (Source: TERRA)

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