Army "Green"

In Their Own Words: Interview with Karenni Evergreen

Biodiversity's Best Bet
THE ISSUES...

ARMY "GREEN"

While the human rights violations inflicted by Burma's current regime have been well documented, less has been heard about the impact that decades of military rule have had on the environment. Seeking much needed hard currency, Burma's generals have opened up the country's abundant natural resources to the outside world. Extensive logging and mining, as well as large-scale hydroelectric and natural gas projects, are having a devastating effect on Burma's ecosystems. What's more, these projects are often linked to human rights abuses, creating a vicious cycle of ecological degradation and repression.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

An important step in protecting the environment is educating local people about the issue. Indigenous, grassroots organizations, such as Karenni Evergreen (KEG), can play a vital role in this regard. Today, as a result of rampant logging and traditional farming methods, sixty percent of the rich forests that once covered Karenni State has been cut down. In this interview with Burma Debate, a KEG representative discusses ways in which the organization is helping to turn this tide through its education and prevention programs.

BIODIVERSITY'S BEST BET

Civil conflict can have a devastating toll on the environment. The end of conflict does not, however, guarantee an end to the destruction. In Burma's Kachin State for example, where a ceasefire agreement has been in place since 1994, the experience has been just the opposite. This period of "peace" has seen a logging boom threaten one of Southeast Asia's most densely forested regions and the wealth of biodiversity it holds. What steps can be taken to address the real problems at hand? What lessons can be learned from Burma's neighbors? And what role can the international community play in this effort?
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THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF MILITARY RULE IN BURMA

By Yuki Akimoto

Burma's Salween River, currently the longest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia.
he complexion of Burma's ecology is rich and diverse, a unique blend of climates and terrains containing an almost inexhaustible wealth of natural resources. Magnificent in their density and expanse, hardwood forests blanket large portions of the country; to the east, Burma's corner of the Himalayan massif is laden with gems and minerals; off Burma's shores rest abundant fields of natural gas and oil. Tigers, rhinos, tapirs, great hornbills, and elephants still make their homes in the forests and jungles that span the country, and are examples of Burma's tremendous biodiversity.

The Salween River, the longest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia, runs through China, Burma and along the Thai-Burmese border into the Andaman Sea. Yet this natural bounty is now under attack.

While it is well known that Burma's ruling military brutally abuses human rights, the harm being done to the country's environment by the regime and by business interests is often overlooked. Since coming to power in 1988, the current regime's willingness to open up Burma's abundant natural resources to exploitation has had a devastating impact on the country's ecosystems. Although it is not unusual for nations rich in natural resources to liquidate a portion of their natural capital to build roads, schools, hospitals and other services needed to develop their societies, this regime has used these monies to fund the expansion of its armed forces and perpetuate its power. To keep the army supplied and modernized, vast sums have been spent on weaponry. These arms are used almost exclusively against Burma's own peoples, causing massive human rights abuses that are often carried out in the context of environmentally destructive "development projects."

Once seen as the country in Southeast Asia with the brightest economic future — by mid-century it was the world's second largest rice producer and its untapped mineral wealth and forest cover held great financial promise — Burma today is beset with fiscal ruin. Regularly facing bankruptcy, the regime's response to its fiscal woes has been twofold. First, it has supplemented declining sources of foreign investment with uncompensated "people's contributions," chiefly of labor, to build or maintain irrigation, transportation and tourism infrastructure projects. At the same time, it has increased exports of teak, rice and other natural resources. The regime's very existence is due in large part to the significant funds generated by its exploitation of the environment. The generals have allowed massive logging — notably of teak — as well as construction of gas pipelines and other large-scale development projects that have triggered destruction of the ecosystem, degradation of waterways and loss of precious wildlife.

Moreover, this quest for foreign exchange is often linked to human rights abuses, creating a vicious cycle: The regime violates the human rights of the populace while pursuing ecologically harmful projects, the revenue from which subsidizes further repression and abuse. The linkage is evident in various ways: When people's sources of livelihood disappear as forests are clear-cut, wildlife is poached, or large-scale industrial activity ruins water quality. Such violations are neither exclusively human rights issues nor exclusively environmental ones.

THE PIPELINE PROJECTS

The Yadana and Yetagun natural gas pipeline projects are the largest direct investment ventures in Burma and perhaps best illustrate the ways in which human rights abuses and environmental degradation may occur simultaneously. The pipelines have the capacity to generate hundreds of millions of dollars annually, making them by far the largest sources of legitimate foreign exchange for Burma's iron-fisted military rulers. Their construction and operation, however, have led to serious human rights and environmental abuses in the project area.

Three western oil companies, Unocal Oil (U.S.), Total (France) and Premier Oil (U.K.) entered into partnerships with the military regime to build natural gas pipelines originating off the coast of Burma in the Andaman Sea. The Yadana pipeline was constructed by Total and Unocal, and Premier built the Yetagun pipeline. The pipelines traverse an expansive area of forest, pristine jungle and hills across Tenasserim Division in southern Burma to a processing plant in...
Just as they have devastated people's lives and livelihoods, the pipeline projects have led to extensive destruction of the environment.

Without consulting these local communities, the companies and regime reached contractual agreements about the pipeline projects, which moved forward during the 1990s. Military units entered the area, ostensibly to provide security for the companies. What followed was the violent suppression of dissent, conscription of forced labor, forced relocation of local populations, torture, rape and summary executions.⁸

While committing such human rights abuses in the pipeline region, the military regime is also destroying traditional ways of life. Many of these communities view themselves as inextricably connected to their ecosystem and dependent upon it for material and spiritual sustenance. For those who fish for their survival, for example, the army has curtailed people's harvesting opportunities through travel restrictions or forced labor requirements. The remaining few who are allowed to fish must yield their finest catches to soldiers. The military also restricted hunters' and gatherers' access to the jungle, and traders could no longer move or trade freely. In addition, some peoples, such as the Karen and Mon, have traditional cultural connections to their environment. Many have inherited lands from their ancestors; having to leave the area because of forced labor or relocation by the military is tantamount to abandoning these forebears and nullifies a deep bond these people have with the land.

Just as they have devastated people's lives and livelihoods, the pipeline projects have led to extensive destruction of the environment. The forests in the pipeline area are dense, closed-canopy ecosystems.⁹ Many large trees were felled for the construction of the pipelines and an access road.¹⁰ Military units brought in for pipeline security have engaged in illegal logging, reportedly using sawmills along the pipeline route.¹¹ There are first-hand accounts by refugees and victims of forced labor that the military engaged in logging in the pipeline region, sending the logs to Tavoy for sale.¹²

The forests in the pipeline area are the major links between the fauna of both Indochina and the Himalayas, and those of the Malayan peninsula. A continuous rainforest ecosystem, the largest of its kind in Southeast Asia, extends throughout the length of the Thai-Burmese border.¹³ Construction of both pipelines in Burma has entailed clearing and fragmentation of the existing forest.¹⁴ This swath of cleared forest acts as a barrier to the migratory movement of large mammals and other species.

Furthermore, Tenasserim Division is home to some of the most critically endangered mammals in the world, such as elephants, tigers, tapirs and bears.¹⁵ Kitti's hog-nosed bats, the smallest mammal species in the world, also live in caves near the pipeline route in Thailand.¹⁶ The pipelines effectively have split the forest into two parts.¹⁷ The access road has disrupted the migration corridor, threatening the stability and cohesiveness of the entire forest ecosystem. Wildlife in those areas must contend with reduced habitat availability and decreasing food supply, while being rendered increasingly vulnerable to hunting. While the pipeline's permanent, all-weather road will enable hunters and loggers to enter the area, the influx of patrolling soldiers to protect the pipelines poses additional risks for the species.¹⁸ One villager witnessed soldiers shoot and kill a rhinoceros.¹⁹ Another local resident noted that several military units in the pipeline area were hunting a rare white elephant.²⁰
Erosion is also a serious issue because the rainfall in the region is very heavy (up to 7,000 mm per year). Pipeline construction activities have eroded cleared areas and caused siltation of streams. Poor construction of Total’s pipeline track has left the area even more vulnerable. Without stabilization and drainage work, the track may wash out in the rainy season, destroying stream flora and fauna, damaging the water quality for downstream users and increasing turbidity in local water sources.

Because of the highly explosive nature of natural gas, pipelines pose a broad range of immediate dangers. Should the pipelines be targets of attack by ethnic rebels or villagers opposed to the projects, it could result in a devastating explosion that would destroy anything in close proximity and ignite forest fires. Additionally, there is the issue of exposure to natural gas due to gas leaks, which can reduce the blood’s capacity to carry oxygen, resulting in symptoms such as dizziness, nausea and irregular breathing. Exposure at higher levels causes vomiting and loss of consciousness, and can be fatal. There has already been one gas leak from the Yadana pipeline reported, which left many villagers ill from the exposure to the gas.

Independent of the pipeline projects, widespread degradation of Burma’s forests bears yet another mark of the regime’s exploitation of natural resources. Forests cover half of Burma, and from the 1970s until the mid-1980s, Burma had the lowest deforestation rate in Southeast Asia. Today, however, timber exports rank as Burma’s top export. For example, Burma is home to over 70% of the world’s remaining teak forest; about 80% of all the teak on the global market originates in Burma. The exporting of teak logs from Burma has significantly increased in the last two years. Overall, the rate of deforestation in Burma has more than doubled since 1988, and it is project...
ed that most of the world's teak could disappear within a generation.

In addition, there has been a significant rise in the quantity of illegal Burmese timber exports. Burma is the single largest supplier of illegal timber into Thailand, supplying 70% of total illegal imports. The military's weak enforcement of what forestry regulations do exist, along with the regime's willingness to sacrifice the environment for foreign exchange, ensure that logging will continue to proceed at an unsustainable pace.

LARGE DAM PROJECTS

Large dams, often built to provide hydroelectric power, have had an extensive impact on rivers, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. The effects of large dam construction and maintenance are more negative than positive and have led, in many cases, to the irreversible loss of species and the damaging of ecosystems. In many countries where national legislation requires higher standards of ecological performance, dams have been decommissioned to restore the environment.

The prospective Tasang Dam project on the Salween River in Burma's southern Shan State has attracted attention in recent years, partly because of its sheer scale (it was slated to be one of the largest dams in Southeast Asia, at least 188 meters high, with a flood area of no less than 640 square kilometers), and partly because of its resemblance to other destructive development projects such as the Yadana and Yetagun pipelines. If it is built, the Tasang Dam would be the first dam on the Salween River, which is currently the longest free-flowing river in Southeast Asia. The possible project site is on indigenous land, but there has been no public participation in decisions regarding the venture. So far, a pre-feasibility study and a feasibility study have been conducted. During that time, military presence in the area increased, resulting in forced labor and other human rights abuses against the local populace.

The Tasang Dam, if completed, will surely generate the kind of problems that large dams usually cause. The list of these problems is long: loss of forests, wildlife habitat and species populations; degradation of catchment areas due to inundation of the reservoir area; destruction of aquatic biodi-

Until 1988, the ethnic minorities controlled the timber trade along the Thai-Burmese border. After the current military regime seized power in 1988, however, it granted numerous large-scale timber concessions on indigenous lands to foreign companies. These logging contracts, worth $112 million a year, covered up to 18,800 square kilometers, tripling the size of the area being exploited. The ethnic communities had traditionally practiced low-impact harvesting methods, but the foreign companies, using large machines, adopted harmful clear-cutting and over-cutting practices. The width of the logging roads was greater than needed, and large areas of bare soil were exposed to erosion. The roads also often ran beside streams, causing rapid siltation. Uncontrolled road construction and clear-cutting, combined with heavy rainfalls and steep slopes, caused rapid soil erosion, reduced dry season flow and increased flooding of the Salween River.

Officially known as "Kitti's hog-nosed bat," it is the smallest mammal species in the world and is now endangered.
versity and fisheries; and reduction of nutrient replenishment downstream from the dam site. There can also be cumulative adverse impacts on water quality, natural flooding and species composition where multiple dams are built on the same river. Reservoirs may emit greenhouse gases from rotting vegetation and carbon inflows from the catchment area. With the Tasang Dam, there may also be erosion of riverbed downstream, logging in the reservoir area before it is flooded, malaria breeding in the reservoir and degradation of forests by people who have lost their livelihood due to the construction of the dam.

The Tasang Dam project appears to have stopped for now, but even if it does not move forward, there are other dams in Burma that are currently being planned or are already under construction. To reduce the country’s shortage of electricity, the military regime intends to develop many more hydroelectric power plants, some of which may involve the construction of large dams. But as with other large-scale development projects in Burma, there are few regulatory controls and inadequate enforcement to help protect the environment. Despite a growing international trend towards smaller local energy projects that have a less harmful impact on the environment, Burma does not appear to be pursuing such alternatives.

MINING

Burma's rich mineral and gem resources, which include gold, copper, tungsten, ruby and jade, have attracted both small and large mining ventures. Regardless of the method used, mining yields byproducts such as waste rock and tailings (residue from mineral processing), both of which cause serious environmental damage. The environmental impacts of mining can go far beyond the boundaries of a particular mining site; acid-generating materials and minerals derived from waste rock can be transported by water, spreading pollutants hundreds of miles from the source of contamination. Tailings often contain sulfide minerals, which can generate acid mine drainage when they come into contact with water and air and can also contain toxic metals and processing chemicals.

The largest copper mine in Burma, at Monywa in Mandalay State, is a joint venture spearheaded by a Canadian businessman and financed by Japanese trading companies. While little information exists about the ecological harm caused by the Monywa mine specifically, copper mining generally is notorious for producing a huge volume of uncontrolled and poisonous pollutants. The method employed at the Monywa mine generates significant amounts of toxic liquid and sludge that may end up in waterways, resulting in siltation, acid drainage and contamination of underground aquifers. Furthermore, tropical conditions such as those in Burma, may contribute to the weakening of ore processing equipment, which can result in disastrous leaks or spills.

Such problems are exacerbated by Burma's poor mining regulations and enforcement. Mining operators in Burma have no legal obligation to carry out environmental and social impact studies, and virtually no responsibility to prevent or mitigate harmful impacts on the environment. Indeed, anecdotal evidence indicates that no attention is paid to safeguarding the environment from the significant quantities of toxic wastes that mining operations typically generate.

CONCLUSION

Today, industrial development in various sectors has jeopardized Burma's environment. Poor or non-existent government regulations, coupled with opportunistic foreign investors, are threatening Burma's forests, waterways, air and animals. The
negative impact these practices have on Burma's people is compounded by the systemic human rights abuses inflicted by the military regime. Until those who are exploiting Burma’s environment begin to prioritize ecological protection and respect for human rights, the future of the country's natural and human resources will be grim.

ENDNOTES
2 Earthrights International, Destructive Engagement: A Decade of Foreign Investment in Burma (1999) [hereinafter Destructive Engagement], 4. According to the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, since 1988, the military regime has “greatly increased defense spending, apparently to at least half of total central government operating expenditures, in the absence of any evident external military threat, while substantially reducing expenditures for education and health.”
3 The company has been known as TotalFinaElf since 2000.
4 According to the United Nations, from 1990-1997, the military regime spent 264% more on military spending than it did on health and education combined. Since 1988, the Burmese military has more than doubled in size from 180,000 troops to over 400,000.
5 Total Denial Continues, 18.
6 Ibid., 13.
7 Total Denial Continues, 16.
8 The company has been known as TotalFinaElf since 2000.
10 Ibid., 154.
11 Destructive Engagement, 13, citing EarthRights International Interview 982 (on file with authors).
12 Total Denial Continues, 154-155.
13 Ibid., 157-158.
14 It bears noting that a second pipeline was built for the Yadana project that is parallel to the Yadana pipeline in the Burma, instead of running the gas through a single pipe as was done in Thailand. The oil companies do not explain why the same could not be done in Burma. The additional pipeline amplifies the impacts of the Yadana pipeline with respect to fragmentation of the forest.
15 Total Denial Continues, 158.
16 Ibid., 144.
17 Ibid., 151.
18 Ibid., 128-129.
19 Ibid., 128.
20 Ibid., 157.
21 Ibid., 156.
22 Ibid., 156-157.
23 Ibid., 156-157.
24 In the United States, the number of natural gas pipeline accidents since 1986 exceeded 3000, causing over 300 deaths and about 1400 injuries. Bob Rackleff, "Grieving Carlsbad," Albuquerque Tribune, September 9, 2000, Page C1.
25 Total Denial Continues, 155.
26 Ibid., 155.
28 Frontier Forests at 13.
29 Ibid., 13.
30 Ibid., 5.
31 Based on Burma’s fiscal year of April/March. Halstead.
32 Frontier Forests at vii.
33 Ibid., 17.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 18.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 14-15, 17.
40 Ibid., 15.
42 WCD, 92.
43 The pre-feasibility study was conducted by Lahmeyer International (Germany), and Electric Power Development Co. (Japan) conducted the feasibility study. The developer is the GMS Power Co. Ltd. (Thailand).
44 See generally WCD, 73-96. See also Patrick McCully, Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams (Enlarged and Updated Edition, 2001), 29-64.
45 WCD, 75-77.
46 Kansai Electric Co. of Japan signed a consulting contract in August 2001 with the military regime to provide technical support for the development of 12 power plants over the next five years. Kansai Electric Co. Press Release, August 3, 2001.
48 See generally McCully; Seth Dunn and Christopher Flavin, Sizing Up Micropower, Worldwatch Institute State of the World 2000. See also WCD.
51 Golden Dreams, 61-92.
52 Ibid., 50.
53 Ibid.
54 Grave Diggers, 36-37.
55 Ibid., 58.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 14-15.
58 Interview with a former mining engineer on mining conditions in Burma. Grave Diggers, 63.

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Karenni Evergreen is an indigenous grassroots organization that was formed in October 1996 in order to increase environmental awareness among Karenni people. Its membership is comprised of Karenni in the camps along the Thai-Burma border and people living inside Karenni State. KEG, as it is informally known, is dedicated to preventing further destruction of Karenni State's rainforests and natural resources and to instilling a sense of responsibility among the Karenni people for protecting their environment.
**Burma Debate** • What is the general attitude among the Karenni toward the environment?

**Karenni Evergreen** • The word, "environment" is very strange to the Karenni people. They never really took notice of their environment, even though in their daily lives they were deeply connected to it.

Traditionally, Karenni people didn't know what environment was, but they knew that they loved their forest. They understood that the forests provided them with many things they needed. They tried to keep the nearby water sources clean and to protect some species of animals. In fact, there is an ancient religious ceremony that shows their respect for the forests called *Kay Htwe Boe* which is very famous among the Karenni people.

Of course, some people have also made their living from illegal logging. Many local people have no choice because selling wood is the quickest and easiest way to earn money. In this way, the people have abused their environment. But the people may have no idea about conservation because they are not educated on environmental issues. Also, there is no incentive on the part of the ruling military to educate Karenni people about the environment because the regime has allowed local companies and ceasefire groups in the region to be involved in extensive logging in Karenni State.

You should understand that most of Karenni land was covered with forest except for the paddy fields located in the valley region of the capital city Loikaw and south to Demawso. Logging has been the state economy since the eighteenth century and timber its major economic resource. Beginning in 1982, the BSPP [Burmese Socialist Programme Party] government granted logging permits to local and foreign companies. Along the Thai/Burma border, the KNPP [Karenni National Progressive Party] used logging as a way to support their resistance to the Burmese central government — although they stopped logging about five years ago. The destruction got worse after the current military regime took power. There has been extensive logging in the eastern part in Pha Saung and Mae Se townships.

**BD** • What other factors have contributed to deforestation?

**KEG** • Shifting cultivation, charcoal making, firewood consumption and small-scale cutting by individuals have all contributed to the destruction. In particular, shifting or slash-and-burn cultivation has led to widespread deforestation.

**BD** • How has this affected the environment?

**KEG** • Slash-and-burn cultivation, or *Taung Ya*, as it is called in Burmese, is the traditional farming method for most Karenni people. They cut trees on the side of the mountain and grow paddy or crops. Because people didn't understand how to keep the soil fertilized, they could only use a field for two or three years and then they must find a new place and cut more trees. Every family used this kind of agriculture so as years passed, people would have to go farther and farther to find a new farm. This caused a lot of destruction. As a result of this and the extensive logging, today over 60% of forests in Karenni State have been cut down.

The destruction of the forests have also led to climate changes. The weather has become much warmer. There has been less rain. In fact, there was a severe drought in 1998. Many crops and paddy fields failed, water levels in the Moe Byae dam and Baluchaung river dropped and there was not enough water volume for the two hydroelectric power stations located downstream in the Baluchaung river. The people who farmed near the Baluchaung river were not allowed to irrigate water from the rivers and the farmers again turned to cutting wood for their income.

**BD** • What is KEG doing to help address some of these problems?

**KEG** • Currently, KEG has four main programs. One of them is the Environmental Awareness Project. Through this project we publish the quarterly magazine, *Htee Khay* (Environmental Journal). We also produce and distribute Environmental Awareness T-shirts and color posters. In addition, we hold Environmental Awareness Training workshops and have translated books
about the environment into Burmese and Karenni.

Through our Environmental Education Program we've designed an environment textbook in Karenni for primary school children and developed an environment awareness program geared toward them. We've also held an arts competition and conducted environmental learning tours.

KEG's Pollution Prevention Campaign is done in cooperation with environmental education groups in each camp. One of the activities they've carried out with the children is an exchange of used batteries for candy.

The two other on-going projects KEG conducts are agricultural. We have a project on organic home gardening, which is farming without the use of chemicals. KEG is now introducing this to people in the refugee camps. We have set up a model organic garden in each camp and are distributing seeds to the refugees to plant their own gardens. In addition, we try to teach people about how to protect watershed areas and about the use of shade trees. We've also introduced fast-growing firewood plants so we can preserve more of the forests and we've tried to teach people about forest fire prevention.

Our fourth project area is reforestation. This is of primary concern to KEG. We have a seedbed site near the Thai/Burma border and we replant trees beyond the border in Karenni State. This year we planned to replant 60,000 trees including teak, hardwood and some fruit trees. But we were only able to get 40,000 planted. Right now, we are based in Thailand, but hopefully in the future we will be able to work inside Karenni State and then KEG would like to reforest all the areas that have been logged.

BD • Earlier you mentioned the power stations located along the Baluchaung river. Could you discuss this further?

KEG • There are two power stations that depend on water from the Baluchaung river. Baluchaung Hydroelectric Power Station No-(1) is located ten miles south of Loikaw. It was built by the Japanese government in 1986. Most of the electric power went through to Rangoon and Mandalay in central Burma. Baluchaung Hydroelectric Power Station No-(2) is located 12 miles south of Loikaw and was built by the Japanese government as war compensation to Burma in 1958.

BD • What has been the impact of the stations?

KEG • As far as providing electricity to local communities, it is good. Because of these power stations, however, local people have lost their fields and land located near the construction area. Their lands were seized without compensation. The military then laid landmines around the power station. This restricted the area where local communities could look for food, which drastically changed the lifestyle of the people.

BD • What has been the effect on the environment?

KEG • The building of power station No. 1 has had a major impact on the environment. When it was built, it required many kinds of construction: reservoirs, water channels, water pipes, a water control tower and power lines. This caused a lot of destruction to the environment. Over 18,000 landmines were laid within five miles around the power station. Wild animals are killed by these landmines and the local communities are not allowed to or not dare go into the area. Some local people have been victims of these landmines.

KEG has been involved in advocacy efforts regarding the power station and also the proposed Salween River dam project. KEG collected the signatures of 13,000 Karenni people both in border area and inside Karenni State to protest the project. We also opposed the Japanese ODA [Official Development Assistance] to the military regime to repair the Baluchaung hydroelectric power station in Lawpita, Karenni State.

BD • What is KEG's long-term goal?

KEG • To prevent further destruction of Karenni's valuable rainforest and natural resources and to make the whole of Karenni State forever a 'green' state, in which everyone has a sense of responsibility to help in protecting the natural environment.
INTRODUCTION

In addition to its dreadful human toll, war is bad for biodiversity. Its devastating environmental effects have been well documented and are part of the conventional wisdom that links conflict and biodiversity loss. But if war is bad for biodiversity, the end of conflict entails its own risks. In Cambodia, the U.N.-brokered 1993 election triggered a boom in illegal logging, deforestation, and wildlife hunting as competing political parties, in anticipation of further conflict, stripped the country of its biodiversity. This natural resource-financed stand-off culminated in the coup d’état of July 1997 when then co-Prime Minister Hun Sen crushed his political opponents.

Burma faces similar problems. As a result of its extensive forest cover and wide range of physical conditions, Burma is rich in biodiversity, containing nearly 300 known mammal species, about 1,000 birds, 370 reptiles, and 7,000 plants. Most of the undisturbed forests are located in the mountains that ring the country. These mountains are home to about 20 million members of ethnic minority groups, many of whom have been engaged in insurrection since independence in 1948. Low-level, but continuous, warfare has inflicted extensive environmental damage as populations have been forcibly relocated, hilltops have been cleared for defensive purposes, and logging roads have been cut to extract timber and facilitate military operations.

Recently, ceasefires with 17 of the 20 largest ethnic armies have stabilized the military’s position, but anecdotal and statistical evidence indicates a surge in logging and wildlife hunting. The regime and some of its opponents appear to be locked in a zero-sum game whereby the timber and wildlife that are not extracted by one side may well be captured and exploited by the other. This paper examines post-conflict biodiversity loss in Kachin State in Northern Burma. It then offers suggestions for how the conservation community could intervene if Burma transitions to a more participatory and accountable form of government.
Kachin State, one of the most sparsely populated, densely forested and inaccessible parts of Southeast Asia, exemplifies the post-conflict risks for biodiversity conservation. Because China supplied the ethnic armies with guns and rice, lessening their dependence on logging, Kachin State suffered little deforestation during the decades of warfare. But in 1989, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) collapsed and the border area came under the control of the New Democratic Army (NDA). Rather than force an unconditional surrender, which would have risked further armed opposition, the government agreed to a ceasefire. In return for ending all military activity, the NDA was allowed to run logging companies and jade mines free of government interference. In 1994, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), searching for peace after 34 years of armed conflict that had produced no real change in the political situation, agreed to a similar ceasefire.

The political struggle ended, but large-scale logging took off. Analysis of satellite images shows that the rate of forest clearing increased from 1.09 percent per annum for 1989-1993 to 1.37 percent per annum for 1993-1996. Because the rate of clearing is both high and increasing, it suggests that the previously intact forest cover is being opened up. The abundance of re-growth and the spatial pattern of forest clearing suggest that the deforestation is primarily the result of exploitative logging and shifting cultivation (Brunner et al. 1998).

Illegal logging in Burma's border regions, particularly in Kachin State, has grown rapidly in response to a growing demand for timber from China, India, and Thailand, Burma's densely populated and forest-poor neighbors. The illegal timber trade is inherently hard to quantify, but an estimate of its magnitude and direction can be gleaned from statistics collected by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) in Yokohama. The table compares the volume of logs that Burma reports as exports to the volume that its neighbors report as imports (ITTO 2000).

These statistics show a sharp drop in log exports from 1993 to 1995 and a steady increase from 1995 to 1999. What is striking is the virtual doubling of log imports reported by China between 1998 and 1999. Since then, China's total log imports have skyrocketed from less than 5 million cubic meters in 1998, when a logging ban was introduced, to 15 million in 2000. Observers report endless convoys of trucks piled high with logs entering China from Burma and Chinese loggers have allegedly penetrated 100 km into Burma (The Washington Post 2001). Warlords in Kachin State apparently sell cutting rights to Chinese contractors. Power struggles among warlords impose high risks on the Chinese, who respond as rational businessmen by cutting as much and as fast as possible, encouraging the most damaging and wasteful logging practices. Logging also facilitates wildlife hunting and trading. In 1998, almost 30 tons of wildlife, dead and alive, are estimated to have been smuggled into Yunnan from Burma each month.
FUTURE STEPS

Should the political situation improve in Burma, the international community will face significant challenges in its efforts to help conserve the country's dwindling biodiversity. These include rigorous hunting that has removed wildlife from many forest areas and potential hostility among the rural population toward government-led conservation efforts. However, the country retains a cadre of foreign-educated forestry officials who are aware of how the regime's policies undermine conservation, and what needs to be done. Observers still consider the level of competence in the Forest Department to be higher than in Laos and Cambodia.

How should the international community respond? First, a forest sector review should be prepared to address the fundamental policy and institutional constraints of better forest management. Second, a system of independent monitoring and reporting on forest conditions should be set up. Third, conservation organizations and the government should reach consensus on a set of priority actions to be implemented jointly. Finally, the formal participation of local communities in timber production and conservation should be supported.

Forest sector review

Burma's 1992 Forest Law marks a shift away from treating its forests as a purely commercial resource. It emphasizes the importance of forests in contributing "toward the food, clothing, and shelter needs of the public and for the perpetual enjoyment of benefits by conservation and protection." The 1995 Forest Policy proposes specific measures in the areas of reforestation, environmental protection and public participation. But policy implementation has been very difficult given the regime's heavy military expenditures, lack of macroeconomic transparency, and human rights abuses.

A logical first step is to carry out a comprehensive forest sector review, similar to exercises that the World Bank has led in Cambodia (1996) and Laos (2000). Unlike the U.N. or most bilateral donors, the World Bank has the financial leverage and political clout (should it choose to use it) to address the governance problems that drive Burma's biodiversity loss. The review could be carried out in collaboration with government or independently, depending on the political context. What is essential, however, is that it deals with the real problems at hand. A lesson learned from Cambodia and Laos, for example, is the need to bring the commercial sector under control; if it continues unchecked, there is little prospect for effective conservation. Regulating logging may be particularly hard in Burma where foreign and government-run companies have prospered with impunity due to the state of lawlessness in the country.

Cambodia also shows the importance of dealing with an oversized and underpaid army that is forced to live off the land. Military complicity in illegal logging, hunting and fishing has been well documented and is arguably the greatest single threat to biodiversity in Cambodia. Until an effective demobilization program is in place, internationally supported conservation efforts will have limited impact. With the region's largest army — over 400,000 soldiers — Burma may face even greater problems.
Governance measures
Throughout the region, improving forest management means confronting powerful vested interests. Experience suggests that overcoming these interests requires a free press, an independent judiciary, effective law enforcement and a government that enjoys broad popular support. But it will take years, possibly decades, to build this capacity in Burma, by which time there may be little left to save.

A forest sector review should therefore identify reforms that will contribute in the short term to more transparent and accountable forest management. One option is to introduce a forest monitor that reports to, but is operationally independent from, the government. Global Witness (GW), the London-based environmental watchdog that exposed the illegal timber trade between the Khmer Rouge and Thailand in the mid-1990s, was installed as Cambodia’s independent monitor in 1999. In collaboration with a forest crime monitoring and reporting unit, GW is responsible for investigating crimes and preparing cases for the government to act on. If the government refuses to respond appropriately, donors (which pay for half of all government spending) can claim that due process is not being followed and exert pressure. GW’s intervention has improved donor confidence in the government’s handling of the forest estate and has led to a marked reduction in illegal logging.

Other reforms to promote public awareness and debate over Burma’s biodiversity could include preparing reports on forest conditions and trends in local languages; publishing up-to-date statistics on timber production and exports; and imprisoning government officials convicted of illegal logging, buying or selling endangered wildlife, and other forest crimes.

Such “governance” measures are not silver bullets. Forest management in Cambodia is bedeviled by technical weaknesses, and keeping these measures in place requires strong and consistent donor backing in the face of obstruction and violence perpetrated by those opposed to transparency. However, experience in Cambodia and other countries suggest that when properly implemented, these measures can help “buy time” for biodiversity until the longer-term institutional and policy reforms are underway.

Protected areas
The forest sector review should address the state of Burma’s protected areas, which are the cornerstones of any country’s efforts to conserve biodiversity. In the early 1980s, UNDP/FAO supported a national parks project that proposed the creation of several potentially valuable conservation areas (Blower 1985). Yet an implementation phase was never initiated because the government insisted that a large part of the budget be used for road construction. The New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is carrying out a review of protected areas and is working with the Forest Department to create new areas such as the 380,000-ha Khakaborazi National Park. However, progress is slow, and Burma still has barely two percent of its land surface under protection — by far the lowest proportion in the region.

Surveys suggest that rhinos and tigers are extinct in their home ranges as a result of hunting and habitat destruction. Burma increasingly epitomizes what
conservationists refer to as the "silent forest" syndrome: forests that are intact but devoid of wildlife. A WCS-led study shows that grazing, hunting, fuel-wood collection, and permanent settlements occurred in more than half the protected areas surveyed, with biodiversity loss severest in older protected areas (Rao et al. 2001). The study recommends controlling hunting, involving local communities in protected areas management, building the technical capacity of staff in protected areas, implementing a comprehensive land use plan, and amending the wildlife laws to fulfill international treaty obligations.

Community forestry

How can Burma's forest resources be managed in a way that encourages conservation and is sensitive to local needs and expectations? An approach that the World Bank has advocated in Laos is to move much of the country's forests into community-based management (World Bank et al. 2001). Donor projects have shown that, given the right technical support, local communities can produce timber in a way that is profitable, equitable and environmentally benign. Implementing this approach nationally would require the government to formally engage the rural population in the protection of their local forests, crack down on illegal logging and institute a free market in timber products.

Moving from a situation in which communities and forestry officials view each other with mistrust and animosity, to one in which they treat each other as partners, implies a fundamental shift in attitudes, particularly on the side of government. Under current conditions, such a shift is unimaginable. However, a more democratic government could initiate a forest management strategy based on community empowerment and benefit sharing. It may then be possible to negotiate community-based law enforcement agreements that limit, or even reverse, encroachment into critical wildlife habitats, and ban the hunting of endangered species.

CONCLUSION

Despite years of war, economic decline and diplomatic isolation, Burma retains significant advantages. The country holds a wealth of biodiversity, the Forest Department has many sincere and dedicated staff, and its forest policy proposes expanding protected areas to ten percent of the country, introducing community forestry. There is great potential for conservation if the political situation improves and if the international community re-engages.

A key question is what, if anything, the international community should do now. Some are opposed to any form of collaboration with the Forest Department, because it risks giving undeserved legitimacy to the regime. Others argue that now is the time to support progressive elements within government in anticipation of a political transition. Both points of view are advocated strongly.

Whether the international community engages sooner or later, however, we face an immediate challenge. Political change could lead to a feeding frenzy as conservationists flock to a country known as "the last frontier of biodiversity in Asia." In anticipation of such change, we therefore recommend building a consensus on a set of priority actions that could form the basis of an internationally supported program implemented in conjunction with a new government. Building this consensus will call for unprecedented levels of communication, coordination and collaboration among conservation organizations.

REFERENCES

Jake Brunner is Senior Director for Mainland Asia at Conservation International (CI). Kirk Talbott is CI's Vice President for Asia-Pacific. For more information about Conservation International visit www.conservation.org.
U.S. CONGRESS COMMENDS AUNG SAN SUU KYI

The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives congratulated Aung San Suu Kyi on the tenth anniversary of her receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, applauding her persistent struggle for freedom and decriing the human rights abuses of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Concurrent Resolutions were passed in the

House on November 14th and in the Senate on December 20th.

SUU KYI AN "INSPIRATION," SAYS BUSH

In a written statement broadcast on December 8th, President George W. Bush praised Aung San Suu Kyi and celebrated the tenth anniversary of her receiving the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize. Noting her continued on page 23
chna's President Jiang Zemin held top-level meetings with the military junta during his four-day visit to Burma, strengthening trade ties and shoring up the countries' economic and strategic alliances. During the December 13th-17th visit — the first by a Chinese president since 1988 — Jiang and State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) chairman Gen. Than Shwe agreed to increase China's investment in Burma and to cooperate on oil production, fisheries, agriculture and technology.

THAILAND SHUTS DOWN BURMESE CAMP

The Thai government closed Maneeloy Holding Center at the end of December. The Thai government established the camp, located some 60 miles from Bangkok, primarily to house student and political activists who had fled Burma after the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. While the majority of Maneeloy's residents had been resettled overseas, the several hundred refugees who remained in the camp were transferred to a Thai border camp.

BURMA ESTABLISHES NUCLEAR PROJECT

SPDC deputy foreign minister Khin Maung Win confirmed the government's plans to build a nuclear reactor in a January 22nd statement. The deputy foreign minister stressed that the project, a collaboration with Russian scientists, was designed exclusively for "peaceful purposes," emphasizing that the 10-megawatt reactor, which will cost roughly U.S. $5 million to build, will be used for nuclear research, to train Burma's scientists and to meet the country's need for radio isotopes. The International Atomic Energy Authority voiced concerns about the country's ability to maintain safety standards, but reported that the reactor would be difficult to engage in the production of nuclear weapons.

BURMA REPLACES AFGHANISTAN AS TOP OPIUM PRODUCER

According to recent U.S. government statistics, Burma's 865 metric tons of opium in 2001 ranks as the world's highest output of the heroin base. Opium growth in Burma has declined in recent years, and Afghanistan's poppy yield has dwarfed Burma's since 1998. Last year, however, the former Taliban government's ban on poppy cultivation, compounded by poor weather, brought Afghanistan's output to just 185 tons of opium, leaving Burma in the lead as top producer.

NOBEL LAUREATES HONOR SUU KYI

On December 8th, the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize, twenty past recipients of the award called for democracy in Burma and lauded Aung San Suu Kyi, who was awarded the prize a decade ago. During an internationally-televised event, which took place simultaneously in Oslo and 35 other cities around the world, Nobel laureates Bishop Desmond Tutu and South Korean President Kim Dae jung spoke out in praise of Suu Kyi's contributions to democracy in Burma. Twenty-four laureates signed a letter addressed to the military junta calling for the release of all "political prisoners." A commemorative stamp issued in Norway has reportedly been banned inside Burma.

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The excerpt is from the article "No crop alongside the gas pipeline." The Mon Forum, November 30, 2001.

In the first week of November, local SPDC authorities in Mudon Township, Mon State, ordered paddy-cultivating farmers in all villages in township to not grow any paddy or other crop within 50 feet of both sides of Kanbauk-Myaingkalay Gas Pipeline that pass through for its security, a farmer family said.

One of SPDC authorities said in their orders, "If they are growing something, it's easy for hiding to plant bombs and (the rebels) can move by covering the plants in there. If we see someone grow something there, we will make arrest" that family added. Therefore, some farmers, whose farms are crossed by gas pipeline, will lose some lands to grow paddy or other crops in the coming year's rainy season (June 2002). In the previous rainy season while the pipeline is under construction, the farmers were not forced by this order.

It was a SPDC local authority attempt, to protect the gas pipeline from demolishing by revolutionary armed groups, that family added. They ordered it everywhere in Mon State, where the gas pipeline-crossed area, according to another source.

The following interviews with former Tatmadaw soldiers describe logging activities in the area of the Yadana pipeline. From Total Denial Continues, a report published by EarthRights International, May, 2000.

"The main business of our commander [of the Total battalion] was logging. There were around ten sawmills in the area. The commander just ordered the local sawmill owners to work for him. He literally gave the permit to the local people, and he got money from logging. Sometimes, we troops had to carry wood for the commander."

"We had to follow and clean up [an area] along the right side of Total company's pipeline road. In our work site, we had to cut down the forest [around] Mile 52. For cutting down the forest, they gave us equipment like chainsaws to cut down the trees, [along with] knives, and axes. It was about more than 200 hard labor workers including some officers. After we cut down the trees, Strategic Command #8's elephants came and pulled the logs. One of the elephant owners said that Strategic Command #8 asked for the elephant labor from [the surrounding area villages]. After that, they ... sent [the logs] to Tavoy to sell."

Rabinowitz weaves naturalism, biology, philosophy and memoir into a heterogeneous and deeply personal account of his search for wildlife in Burma's wilderness. Though the American biologist details time spent in the southern rainforests of the Burmese borderlands, the telling of his journey north into the mountains forms the core of his work. In these chapters, Rabinowitz integrates his focus on biology with his observations of the people of the Himalayan highlands, his traveling companions and even himself, leaving a narrative balance of insight and poignance.

The position is full-time and based in Washington DC. Please contact Arthur Vaughn at (202) 619-1416, or avaughn@voanews.com.

This annual publication documents human rights abuses in Burma, giving case-by-case information about human rights...
violations including forced labor, torture, internally displaced people and forced relocation.

MYANMAR: THE MILITARY'S WORLD VIEW and MYANMAR: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY
By International Crisis Group (ICG)
December 2001
media@crisisweb.org
www.crisisweb.org

ICG's analysis The Military's World View ponders the historical, psychological and economic motivations of State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) policy, particularly vis-à-vis regional politics.

The Role of Civil Society weighs the political and social factors constraining civil society in Burma and considers the implications of current societal trends for future democratization.

THE TROUSER PEOPLE
By Andrew Marshall
2002
Penguin
80 Strand
London
WC2R ORL
Tel: 020 7010 3000
Fax: 020 7010 6060

Andrew Marshall's study of Victorian adventurer Sir George Scott gracefully boxsteps between a biographic history and modern sociological account as it probes Scott's experiences in Burma in the late 1800s. Grounded in archival research, The Trouser People reconstructs the imperialist explorer's early days in Mandalay and Rangoon, his influence on Burma's football craze, his involvement in the "pacification" of Upper Burma and his documentation of ethnic minorities, particularly the Wa. Marshall interfaces his historical undertakings with his own adventures as he follows Scott's path deep into the Golden Triangle's interior.

BURMA UNDER PRESSURE
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February 2002
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Examining different media, press restrictions and journalists themselves, Neumann probes the state of journalism both within Burma and on its border. This report is released by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

SPDC Speaks

"Our precious forests" was featured as an editorial in the January 13th, 2002 issue of The New Light of Myanmar.

Myanmar is endowed with rich natural forests and a major percentage of the total area of the country has a forest cover. Such being the case it is necessary to carry out forest management systematically, applying modern methods. It is worthy of note that forest management was carried out since ancient times when this nation was ruled by Myanmar kings. Times change. In the past more emphasis was given to produce and make use of forest products as much as possible. Now, more priority is being given to environmental protection, biodiversity and ecological balance. Conservation of natural forests is being carried out systematically, observing norms for sustainable cut.

Myanmar has adhered to reafforestation, and in addition, there is an ongoing project for greening of the arid zones to prevent desertification. At the recent coordination meeting, the Minister concerned stressed the need to do research on more widespread use of other hardwoods and to reduce the use of valuable teak and to seek ways and means to produce more medicinal plants, cane and bamboo for boosting the income of the people living in rural areas. In carrying out forest conservation and management, preventing depletion of forests is another vital factor which has been taken into consideration. Ways and means have been sought to protect certain green areas from depletion caused by slash-and-burn cultivation which is being phased out. Agro-forestry system is being applied.

This is to grow perennial crops in forest areas to boost the income of the people residing there. In order to prevent depletion and denudation of forests, more firewood plantations have been created. Fuel substitutes such as briquettes are being produced on an extended scale. The year 1996 was designated "Visit Myanmar Year" and all round efforts were made to attract more tourists to visit the country. Tourist resorts have been created in various parts of the country. Myanmar forests abound in resorts of natural beauty and this is being made known to the world through ecotourism. Ecotourism tasks are being systematically carried out and ecotourism has been planned in such a way that the most significant character of each region is brought out. With concerted efforts made by the Forest Department and the Myanmar Timber Enterprise and the cooperation of the people, especially those residing in forest areas, all projects connected with forest conservation and the greening of designated areas should materialize better and sooner than envisaged. There is also a saying, "The first time you should have planted a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now." We should also take note of it.

Inside Washington (continued)

"[unwavering] commitment to peaceful change," Bush described the Nobel Laureate as a "tireless champion of human rights and democracy," though he remained reticent on the release of political prisoners.

HOUSE SPEAKER TALKS DRUGS WITH THAI GOVERNMENT

During his January 17th visit to Thailand, U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert vowed support for a collaborative effort with Thailand to fight drug trafficking along the borders of Burma, Thailand and Laos, in the area known as the Golden Triangle. Hastert held separate meetings with Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Parliament President Uthai Pimchaichon and Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai, lauding the Thai government's commitment to addressing the narcotics problem through dialogue and regional cooperation. During his visit, Hastert also visited Chiang Mai, where he met with the Third Army Region and the US. Drug Enforcement Agency, discussing joint efforts to combat narcotics trafficking.
Burma Debate is a publication of The Burma Project of the Open Society Institute.

Mary Pack, Editor

THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE (OSI) was established in December of 1993 to promote the development of open societies around the world. Toward this goal, the institute engages in a number of regional and country-specific projects relating to education, media, legal reform and human rights. In addition, OSI undertakes advocacy projects aimed at encouraging debate and disseminating information on a range of issues which are insufficiently explored in the public realm. OSI funds projects that promote the exploration of novel approaches to domestic and international problems.

The Burma Project initiates, supports and administers a wide range of programs and activities. Priority is given to programs that promote the well-being and progress of all the people of Burma regardless of race, ethnic background, age or gender.

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