

Cambodia and Thailand clash on border

By Claire Wardlaw
STAFF WRITER

The ancient, sacred Preah Vihear Temple of the Hindu people has recently become a casualty of — and is even considered one of the catalysts for — a bloody clash between countries that has thus far cost at least eleven lives. Located on the border of Cambodia right next to Thailand, the temple has been the site of a vicious battle since February 4

"There is a history of violence there," Assistant Professor of Religious Studies Eric Mortensen said of the Cambodian-Thailand region, where the two countries have feuded over territorial and political issues for decades. "It's a terribly ghost-ridden place."

Ever since the battle started a little over a week ago, blood has been shed and holes have been shot through the beloved temple's façade.

"Many factors have contributed to this conflict: a decades-old border dispute, a complex geographical position, the civil war in Cambodia, nationalist sentiment from both countries, and economic interests," said George Guo, associate professor of political science, in an e-mail interview.

Although there are many causes of the violence, one of them is the naming of the temple a World Heritage Site under Cambodian jurisdiction by UNESCO in 2008.

"The United Nations has been declaring places as World Heritage Sites to protect them from development, but there is a lot of ugliness on their hands ... the heart and soul of the place is just devastated," said Mortensen

regarding UNESCO's global initiative. "It turned into Epcot Center in Disneyland."

This initiative is a project that ignited the nationalistic resistance of Thailand to claim Preah Vihear Temple and establish a political advantage, especially in light of the upcoming national elections, as reported by The Wall Street Journal.

In 1962, the International Court of Justice deemed the temple under Cambodian ownership; yet, that did not quell Thai officials from firing at the Cambodian troops near the Preah Vihear Temple in early February.

"Thailand probably just didn't even notice that had happened officially, never complained about it, understood the place as being part of Cambodia for a long time ... and then they started to want it back," said Mortensen regarding the Thai incentive to reclaim the space.

Within three days of the violent outbreak, Cambodia pleaded for U.N. assistance, and with UNESCO being responsible for defending its site, the U.N. Security Council has agreed to address the issue on Monday.

"The dispute of the Preah Vihear Temple has stirred nationalist passions in both Cambodia and Thailand for generations," said Guo, giving some explanation for the conflict over the site, explaining that it is a consistently volatile region, yet not the material for extensive carnage.

"I don't think the fighting will last very long," concluded Mortensen, optimistic that this issue will resolve soon. "I hope it doesn't ... there's no real reason for it to be contested at all, other than its history."

Italians demonstrate against Berlusconi

By Abbey Brinkey
STAFF WRITER

Italy is putting its foot down.

Bribing tax authorities. False bookkeeping. Illegal party contributions. Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has had his fair share of skeletons in his political closet. Recently, he has added just one more blemish to his record.

On Tues. Feb. 15, a Milan judge ruled that Berlusconi will be put on trial to face charges relating to prostitution and abuse of office, reports The New York Times.

The New York Magazine reveals that Berlusconi paid a 17-year-old prostitute and then used his political power to get her released from police custody in an unrelated matter. Prostitution convictions can lead to jail time ranging from six months to three years. Abuse of power can lead to four years to 12 years.

While Berlusconi has been able to handle his past accusations, he may not be able to save his political office this time. The New York Times detailed the results of the December vote that led to the conclusion that Berlusconi no longer has the majority vote to be capable of governing.

Berlusconi's scandal has led to an uprising of Italian citizens — many of them women.

According to Times Union, on Sunday, Feb. 13, thousands of women turned up in 200 Italian cities to protest "Berlusconi's debasing of women."

Not only did women show up at the demonstration, but men as well, reports the Guardian.

"I'm going to demonstrate against a prime minister accused of entertaining underage girls, against a culture that exploits women, against Italian men who made endless sexual jokes and brag about wasting lots of time looking at naked women on the web,"

said Mario Calabresi, deputy editor of La Stampa. "In short, I'm going to demonstrate against myself too."

The New York Times discloses that many believe that Berlusconi's situation is not just about sex. It relates to Italy's economic problems, that are beginning to

shadow Greece and Ireland's economic issues late last year and early this year. However, there is the issue as to who will be Berlusconi's successor.

"The problem is simply that the Italians can't imagine who could replace Berlusconi at the moment," novelist and commentator Tim Parks told The New York Times. "It's too dangerous and too much effort to replace him. So it hardly matters how bad the scandal is."

Berlusconi's trial is set for April 6.

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Front lines of change: returning soldiers become farmers

By Omar Hamad
STAFF WRITER

Though thousands of miles away from each other, the deserts of Afghanistan and the deserts of Northern New Mexico are strikingly similar. Containing dry, mountainous landscapes, irrigation ditches, and agricultural economies, it seemed the perfect place for schoolchildren to teach organic farming techniques to National Guardsmen.

The members of Oklahoma's 2nd 45th Agricultural Development Team (a division of the Guard), were trained by students from Pojoaque, New Mexico's Camino de Paz Montessori school in the art of beekeeping and goat-milking, Tikkun Magazine reports.

The members of the unit were training under the auspices of New Mexico's Permaculture Institute, preparing for deployment to Afghanistan in the Fall of 2010. Their mission: to revitalize that country's much-diminished agricultural infrastructure.

This is only one of many recent examples of the links between the U.S. military and efforts to revitalize agricultural inside and

outside of the U.S.

While some troops prepare to assist agriculture overseas, more and more U.S. combat troops are returning home to an increasingly fragile job market. However, the agricultural sector, in which half of all farmers are expected to retire in the next ten years according to The New York Times, is attempting to fill an increasing demand for young blood with returning veterans.

"There is a tremendous need for young farmers, and a big wave of young people inspired to go into the service who are coming home" said Michael O'Gorman, founder of the nonprofit Farmer-Veteran coalition, to The New York Times.

At Archi's Acres in Valley Center, California training in organic avocado farming techniques overlaps with classes in Business for interested veterans.

Teaching sustainable practices including hydroponics, the former Marine and founder of Archi's Acres, Colin Archi, began informally training veterans after buying his Valley Center farm in 2007. Working together with his wife, they benefited from the farm's proximity to the Camp Pendleton Marine Base, just north

of San Diego.

Since then they have begun administering classes through the Veterans Sustainable Agricultural Training VSAT program at MiraCosta College. The program runs at \$4,500 to Camp Pendleton provides assistance to veterans from the base seeking training there.

"What the farm offers veterans is decompression from the trauma of war," said Archi to San Diego's East County Magazine.

According to The New York Times, while only 17 percent of America's population is classified as rural, 45 percent of returning Army veterans are classified as such. This means that many returning soldiers enrolling in VSAT and similar programs come in with previous farming experience, while also being exposed to new agricultural methods.

The hydroponic techniques used at Archi's Acres means that crops are grown in soil-less mediums rather than in soil itself. In addition to being more energy-efficient, Hydroponic methods eliminate 90 percent of contaminants by using alternatives to soil.

"We're able to water several

thousand plants off just five gallons of water," said Archi to East County magazine. "This greenhouse alone uses about as much water as two avocado trees, but it produces several times as much income"

While the program operations have not been entirely smooth, the majority of veterans working at the farm have been positive about their experiences.

"Archi's Acres has given me a lot of peace of mind. Working with other vets is very peaceful," said former Navy Lieutenant Olaf Hansen to East County Magazine. "I don't have to watch every word — and I don't have to dress up, plus I'm learning a lot about organic gardening"

Many returning veterans expressed optimism about the ability of programs such as those at Archi's Acres to ease the return into civilian life.

"One thing I've noticed about agriculture is that you become a creator rather than a destroyer," said former Marine Mike Hanes to The New York Times. Hanes has suffered from PTSD and was left homeless for a year after returning

from a tour in Iraq before coming to Archi's Acres.

The efforts of organic farm training have not only helped integrate returning veterans into civilian life, but also aided in connecting military personnel with their surrounding communities.

"We went to the website of this unit (Oklahoma 2nd 45th) and looked at their goals and found that we have some things in common: teamwork, responsibility, discipline, and helping each other make a difference" said Pat Pantano, executive director of the Camino De Paz school of the student-soldier relationship promoted by the permaculture program.

With sustainable agricultural practices increasingly important in a world of limited resources, soldiers and veterans to pave the way for progressive farming.

"For a comparable age, you won't find people who have had as much responsibility," said John Maki, transition assistance specialist at Archi's Acres to The New York Times.

"They've been tasked with making life-and-death decisions, already."