

Australia to curb drowning epidemic in Asia

Across Asia, one child drowns every 45 seconds

By **SONYA BRYSKINE**
Epoch Times Staff

SYDNEY—In Australia, water safety is as ingrained in beach culture as the Slip-Slop-Slap sunscreen campaigns that have been around since the early 1980s.

Sadly, the level of awareness is not the same for Australia's neighbors. In Asia, one child drowns every 45 seconds, according to estimates.

Every year, up to 350,000 children drown in Asia; the majority are toddlers under the age of 4. Last year, 50 children drowned in Australia.

While the numbers tell a tragic story, one of Australia's leading water safety groups is pioneering a program to try to curb preventable drowning deaths in Asia.

Royal Life Saving (RLS) has announced that it will establish the world's first International Drowning Research Center in Bangladesh, with funding from the Australian government's Agency for International Development, AusAID.

AusAID is providing up to AU\$600,000 (CA 559,887) over three years to the center, whose work will not only focus on Bangladesh, but also the wider South and Southeast Asian regions.

The center will take on key research projects aimed at reducing child drowning divided into three life stages: preschool, school aged and adolescence. The findings and programs will be used to help build awareness and skills across the region to prevent drowning.

The International Drowning Research Center will also promote the need for people across the region to be taught CPR and basic rescue skills.

Royal Life Saving's Chief Operating Officer Justin Scarr says drowning is tragically the number one

'Children are drowning in everything from rivers, lakes, and ponds to wells and even cooking pots.'

—Justin Scarr

killer of children after infancy in many countries in Asia. Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand, and China have recorded the most deaths annually, according to the data published by The Alliance for Safe Children.

Scarr says drowning has been largely a "silent epidemic" that requires urgent action.

"The sheer scale of drowning in the region is shocking in the extreme. Children are drowning in everything from rivers, lakes, and ponds to wells and even cooking pots."

In Australia, childhood drowning is largely associated with recreational activities, while in Asia it is a part of daily living.

"In the developing countries people are living largely a rural lifestyle... water is used to cook, water used to water crops, and water is used for cleaning. All this presents hazards to children."

Scarr says that close to 50 percent of toddlers drown within 33 feet of their homes.

"When the parents are busy, toddlers may wander off and if there's water around this can have tragic consequences."

Also contributing to the problem



AT RISK: Two young girls take a boat out on their own in Long An Province, in South Vietnam. Every year, up to 350,000 children drown in Asia. The Australian government is funding the establishment of the International Drowning Research Center aimed at reducing child drowning in Asia. HOANG DINH NAM/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

is the adults' fatalistic view of the issue, says Scarr.

"It's been happening in such volume that they feel it is largely unpreventable... for children over 4, swimming and water safety skills are the key and millions of children in Asia can't swim. Australian expertise is now working to change this."

Scarr has personally witnessed the tragedy of a child drowning in Bangladesh. The experience, he said, was "quite confronting."

"The most horrifying experience I had was a social autopsy—essentially a community-led investigation into the death of the child. The community was sitting there grieving... more than 100 people."

However, the tragedy has pushed the community to make changes. They have resolved to undertake strategies including survival swimming lessons, and they wish to undertake training in rescue and resuscitation.

In recent years, the Royal Life Saving Association has already made substantial contributions to the region.

Five years ago it started a SwimSafe program with partner The Alliance for Safe Children to prove that Australian techniques to prevent drowning can easily be adapted to suit the Asian context.

As a result, over 40,000 kids were trained in swimming and survival techniques and thousands more are

still waiting to be trained.

"Children love it. They have a lot of fun. The parents also enjoy it... there's a backlog of children to get into the lessons."

The SwimSafe program is now also being piloted in Vietnam and Thailand and will ultimately be expanded across the region.

Scarr hopes that the new research centre in Bangladesh will be just as successful.

"Australia is now making a real difference to drowning prevention in Asia. The sheer scale of the problem is phenomenal. The work that has already been done shows things can be turned around. There's a long way to go and we intend to tackle the challenge head on."

Red Shirts spill blood in Thailand

Protesters douse government buildings in blood, demand that the PM resign

By **CINDY DRUKIER**
Epoch Times Staff

After five straight days of protests, Thailand's prime minister has still not stepped down, leading the "red shirt" protesters to follow through on their ultimatum of pouring blood on government buildings.

On Tuesday, in a supposed Brahman ceremony—unusual in itself for predominantly Buddhist Thailand—the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) spilled jugs of blood onto the ground before all four gates of government headquarters.

Twelve 5-litre bottles, two large buckets, and fifty syringes of blood were collected from protesters and about 60 opposition parliament members, according to the Bangkok Post. Medical personnel reportedly collected the 300,000 cc's of blood from protesters. Thailand has a significant infection rate of HIV/AIDS.

Thaksin was ousted in a bloodless coup in 2006 and was recently convicted on corruption charges with orders to seize \$1.4 billion of his assets.

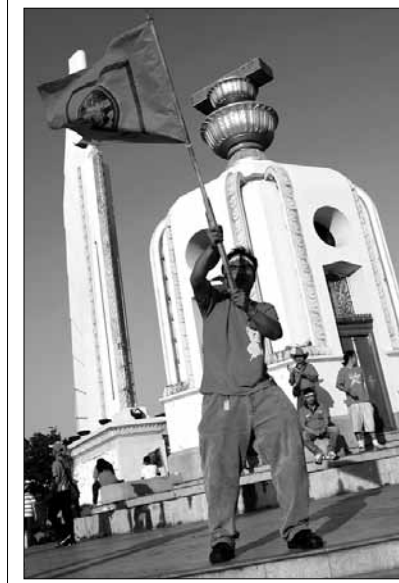
On Wednesday, as rain fell throughout the day, more blood was poured more in front of the prime minister's residence.

While Tuesday's demonstration was orderly, albeit grisly, the crowd was a little more aggressive on Wednesday. In both cases, only a handful of UDD protesters, plus a slew of media, had been allowed by security to watch the ceremonies. The rest of the crowd was kept back by police in riot gear.

UDD organizers have repeatedly promised that the demonstrations will not turn violent, but some protesters took the opportunity of being outside the prime minister's home to lob more blood and other objects over the fence.

The tens of thousands of red-shirted protesters, who have been in the streets since the weekend, are supporters of ex-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin was ousted in a bloodless coup in 2006 and was recently convicted on corruption charges with orders to seize \$1.4 billion of his assets. He is currently living in exile in Dubai, yet keeps a tight hand on events in Bangkok.

The mob also marched to the U.S. embassy to demand answers regarding Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban's claim that the U.S., among other countries, had bugged phone conversations of the deposed prime minister and warned Thai authorities of possible trouble. The embassy accepted their letter, but declined to reply, saying it was up to Suthep to offer clarification, according to the Bangkok Post.



A red-shirted supporter of deposed Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra waves a red flag during a rally at Democracy Monument in downtown Bangkok on March 14, 2010. CHRISTOPHE ARCHAMBAULT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus (R), commander of the U.S. Central Command, and US Navy Adm. Eric Olson, commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command. MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES

U.S. General: Iran nuclear threat unlikely in next year

By **JACK PHILLIPS**
Epoch Times Staff

General David Petraeus, America's top commander in the Middle East, on Tuesday estimated that Iran will not produce a nuclear weapon this year.

Speaking before a U.S. Senate panel in Washington, the General said, however, that the U.S. and international organizations should still keep pressure on Iran by using economic sanctions.

The nuclear threat in Iran "slid to the right a bit and it is not this calendar year," said Gen. Petraeus via a live feed.

Petraeus did not elaborate on why or how Iran has fallen behind in the pursuit of a nuclear weapon.

Iran has denied allegations that it is seeking to build nuclear weapons, insisting it wants enriched uranium for other endeavours.

Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair said the Iranian government was able to produce nuclear weapons last month.

Several top Obama Administration officials suggested that other options would be more effective for handling Iran rather than direct military action.

Petraeus added that President Barack Obama has not "explicitly stated" that he is ruling out military action, but said that other options are more appealing.

Petraeus oversees the wars in both Iraq and in Afghanistan.

Homegrown terrorism reflects the changing tactics of Al-Qaeda

By **JOSHUA PHILIPP**
Epoch Times Staff

Threats and calls for the killing of Americans landed Adam Yahiye Gadahn on the FBI's list of most wanted terrorists, and led to a \$1 million reward for information leading to his arrest. The American al-Qaeda spokesman is not the only one of his kind, however.

Homegrown terrorists—American men and women who have either left the country to join terrorist organizations, or joined others within U.S. borders—have become a growing threat over the past several years.

Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan who was charged with killing 14 people at Fort Hood, Texas, in November 2009 was just one of many.

In December, five American Muslims were arrested in Sarghoda, Pakistan, for allegedly trying to connect with militants. Just this month, American al-Qaeda suspect Sharif Mobley was arrested in Yemen's capital of Sana'a along with 11 other al-Qaeda suspects. The recent arrest of the self-proclaimed "Jihad Jane" adds to the list.

The rise of homegrown terrorists can be partly attributed to the constant access to extremist videos

and materials online. Recruitment methods of al-Qaeda have taken full advantage of the Internet in what is referred to as the "cyber jihad."

A report released by the Simon Wiesenthal Center found that 30 percent of new postings from extremist groups are made on Facebook. Often, after the messages are removed, the same groups will post them again and again. Some have started their own social networking sites, while others work around the "terms of use" agreements.

Included as examples in the report were a Facebook page on "44 ways to support jihad," and another with a video tutorial on how to make a bomb detonator from a cell phone.

CHANGING TACTICS

The workings of al-Qaeda have changed significantly since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. What was once a hierarchical organization with a large budget has turned into an ideological movement, according to a report from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).

Al-Qaeda was once supported by Afghanistan's Taliban government with both funds and a safe location to operate. According to the CFR, "As Fawaz Gerges, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at

Sarah Lawrence College, explains, 'Al-Qaeda central no longer exists.' He says al-Qaeda's senior leaders like Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are more preachers of global jihad than field lieutenants who give direct orders."

There are misconceptions on how al-Qaeda operates, according to Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser, president and founder of American Islamic Forum for Democracy.

"You could have just three or four people that could be driving a lot of this globally by simply putting these ideas to play on different Web sites," said Jasser. "They'll hop from one Web site to the other, but they'll be completely disconnected as far as any direct communication."

The other method al-Qaeda uses is finding Islamic groups that hold "concepts of victimization, concepts of Muslims being persecuted by the non-Muslim West, imperialists, colonialists," said Jasser.

Al-Qaeda then "piggy backs" on the propaganda to recruit from these groups that "travel with similar ideologies and yet may be nonviolent," he said.

Terrorist recruitment videos, often released online, have been tailored to appeal to various

that was led by monks.

Quintana said that there was "no indication" that Burma was intending to release these political prisoners, and submitted a report urging a full inquiry into the regime's alleged abuses.

In his report, Quintana said "the possibility exists that some of these human rights violations may entail categories of crimes against humanity or war crimes under the terms of the statute of the International Criminal Court."

Speaking to the Human Rights Council on Monday, Quintana noted that with elections to be held this year, "Burma is at a critical moment in its history."

However, the country's ambassador to the U.N. Wunna Maung Lwin, said that the report was full of inaccuracies

and "violates the right of a sovereign state."

"We strongly condemn and reject these recommendations and the report as a whole," said the ambassador.

"My government has clearly stated that there are no prisoners of conscience and that those who are serving prison terms are [those] who offended the existing laws and regulations," he told the council.

On Wednesday, Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo told reporters after meeting with his Burmese counterpart, Nyan Win that he would urge the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to call for a reversal of the election decree at the bloc's annual summit in Vietnam next month.

Burma at 'critical moment' as elections loom

BURMA CONTINUED FROM P1

This time, the ruling generals are taking no chances.

Last week, the country released new electoral directives stating that anyone declared a "criminal" under the country's constitution will be barred from running for election. Moreover, no members of political parties are allowed to run as candidates.

On Monday, Tomas Ojea Quintana, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights in Burma (renamed Myanmar by the junta) said that the rules will stifle democracy.

"Under these current conditions, elections in Burma cannot be considered

credible," he told a news conference after presenting a report to the U.N. Human Rights Council.

No formal date has been set for the elections, although the favoured day for superstitious senior general Than Shwe is believed to be 10/10/10. It is also a month before Suu Kyi is due to be released from house arrest.

Suu Kyi's party, allowed to re-open regional offices that have been closed for seven years, is considering whether to boycott the election.

Burma has 2,100 prisoners of conscience in jail, among them 11 members of the NLD. Hundreds more have been jailed since a 2007 popular uprising