

**THE REPRESENTATION IN THE THAI PRESS OF THE
BURMESE EMBASSY AND RATCHABURI HOSPITAL
HOSTAGE CRISES**



**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
(HUMAN RIGHTS)
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
2004**

**ISBN 974-04-5179-9
COPYRIGHT OF MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY**

**THE REPRESENTATION IN THE THAI PRESS OF THE
BURMESE EMBASSY AND RATCHABURI HOSPITAL
HOSTAGE CRISES**



Puttanee Kangkun
.....
Miss Puttanee Kangkun
Candidate

Mike Hayes
.....
Mr. Mike Hayes, Ph.D.
Major advisor

I. Baker
.....
Mr. Iljas Baker, M.Phil
Co - advisor

W. Thitinanthapan
.....
Assoc. Prof. Waraporn Thitinanthapan,
D.D.S, Grad. Dip. Clin. Sc. (Endodontics)
M.Sc. (Clinical Science), Board in Endodontics
Acting Dean
Faculty of Graduate Studies

Petcha
.....
Ms.Sriprapha Petcharamesree
Ph.D
Chair
Master of Arts Programme
in Human Rights
Faculty of Graduate Studies

**THE REPRESENTATION IN THE THAI PRESS OF THE
BURMESE EMBASSY AND RATCHABURI HOSPITAL
HOSTAGE CRISES**

was submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University
for the degree of Master of Arts (Human Rights)

On

May 21, 2004

Puttanee Kangkun

Miss Puttanee Kangkun
Candidate

Mike Hayes
Mr. Mike Hayes, Ph.D.
Chair

I. Baker
Mr. Iljas Baker, M.Phil
Thesis Defence Committee

Pornpimon Trichot
Miss. Pornpimon Trichot, M.A.
Thesis Defence Committee

W. Thitinanthapan
Assoc. Prof. Waraporn Thitinanthapan,
D.D.S, Grad. Dip. Clin. Sc. (Endodontics)
M.Sc. (Clinical Science),
Board in Endodontics
Acting Dean
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Mahidol University

W. Thitinanthapan
Assoc. Prof. Waraporn Thitinanthapan
D.D.S, Grad. Dip. Clin. Sc. (Endodontics)
M.Sc. (Clinical Science),
Board in Endodontics
Acting Dean
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Mahidol University

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am a lucky person to have many *kalayanamitr* (good friends) to help me pass through the obstacles in my life. Without the compassion of the following persons I would never have completed my thesis. The most important is my thesis supervisor, Acharn Mike Hayes. His patience and carefulness helped me to get through all the difficulties I faced during the long period of thesis writing. And from the judicious and meticulous advice of Acharn Iljas Baker, my second advisor, and Acharn Pornpimon Trichot, my external advisor, I have learnt many precious lessons from this thesis. Another very important person is my editor, Alec Bamford, who at the time of writing was also my work supervisor. He did not only edit my thesis but also gave valuable advice. Many times he devoted time to my thesis that he may otherwise have spent with his family, so I would also like to thank his wife and son.

I also wish to thank CUSO, both staff and cooperants, for their understanding when sometimes I was not able to pay full attention to my work because of the distraction of writing the thesis.

I am deeply grateful to the Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB) and its committee for financial support for part of the tuition fees.

I also wish to thank key informants and other people that I consulted to get information for the thesis. The National Library provided access to back issues of newspapers.

I also wish to thank Acharn Sriprapha Petcharamesree for the leadership she has given to the Human Rights programme and the office staff for all of their logistical efforts to each student in order to complete this programme.

Besides these people, I also must thank my family, relatives and friends who supported me with their hearts and their hands, especially my mom and cousins who helped me collecting data and other minor tasks.

Without these people and their support I could never have completed this study. I apologize for all errors and for any improper behavior I may have shown to these people.

Puttanee Kangkun

THE REPRESENTATION IN THE THAI PRESS OF THE BURMESE EMBASSY
AND RATCHABURI HOSPITAL HOSTAGE CRISES

PUTTANEE KANGKUN 4236007 GRHR/M

M.A. (HUMAN RIGHTS)

THESIS ADVISORS: MIKE HAYES, Ph.D., ILJAS BAKER, M.Phil.,

ABSTRACT

In the past five years two significant events involving groups of Burmese peoples in Thailand has had a strong impact on Thai perceptions of the Burmese. The first was the Burmese Embassy occupation on 1 October 1999 and the second was the Ratchaburi Hospital occupation on 25 January 2000. These events were significant because the Burmese in Thailand are generally subject to racial discrimination and the Thai press is one of the major institutions influencing the level of such discrimination. This study examines whether the Thai press performed its work of reporting and commenting on these two events according to ethical codes and human rights standards.

Three Thai newspapers: *Thai Rath* and *Matichon* (both Thai language newspapers) and *The Nation* (an English language newspaper) were selected as the subjects of the study. Content and textual analysis as well as key informant interviews were the methods of study. The press' codes of ethics and some human rights articles formed the conceptual framework of the analysis. The study investigated the reporting of Burmese issues a month before the two events, a month after the two events, and also the news and comments about the two events, in all three newspapers.

The study found that all three newspapers were more positive toward the Burmese in the Embassy event than the Ratchaburi event, but there was little discussion on the human rights aspects of these two events. The attitude of the press towards the events appears to have been strongly influenced by government views, the newspapers' readership, and the source of information. *Thai Rath* was sensationalist in its news coverage and columns, whereas *Matichon* and *The Nation* tended to be more balanced. In all three newspapers human rights standards were not acknowledged.

KEY WORDS: THAI NEWSPAPERS/ NEWS MEDIA ETHICS/ BURMESE
OPPOSITION GROUPS/ HUMAN RIGHTS

102 pp. ISBN 974-04-5179-9

การนำเสนอข่าวของหนังสือพิมพ์ไทยต่อกรณีการยึดสถานทูตพม่าและการยึดโรงพยาบาลราชบุรี
(THE REPRESENTATION IN THE THAI PRESS OF THE BURMESE
EMBASSY AND RATCHABURI HOSPITAL HOSTAGE CRISES)

พุทธณี กางกั้น 4236007 GRHR/M

ศศ.ม. (สิทธิมนุษยชน)

กรรมการควบคุมวิทยานิพนธ์: ไมค์ ฮายเส, อิลแยส เบเกอร์

บทคัดย่อ

โดยทั่วไปคนพม่าเป็นกลุ่มคนที่ถูกเลือกปฏิบัติในสังคมไทย โดยผ่านสถาบันทางสังคมต่าง ๆ รวมทั้งสื่อมวลชน เมื่อห้าปีที่ผ่านมามีสองเหตุการณ์เกิดขึ้นจากการกระทำของกลุ่มคนที่มาจากพม่า ได้แก่ การยึดสถานทูตพม่าวันที่ 1 ตุลาคม 2542 และการยึดโรงพยาบาลราชบุรีวันที่ 25 มกราคม 2543 เหตุการณ์ทั้งสองได้รับความสนใจจากสังคมและสื่อมวลชนอย่างกว้างขวาง ซึ่งได้ก่อให้เกิดนัยสำคัญต่อการศึกษาถึงทัศนคติของสื่อมวลชนที่มีต่อคนพม่าโดยทั่วไปและหลังจากการเกิดเหตุการณ์ทั้งสอง

การศึกษานี้ได้เลือกศึกษาหนังสือพิมพ์สามฉบับ ได้แก่ ไทยรัฐ มติชนและ The Nation โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา การวิเคราะห์ถ้อยความ รวมทั้งการสัมภาษณ์บุคคลเป็นเครื่องมือในการศึกษา และใช้แนวคิดเรื่องจริยธรรมของสื่อมวลชน และหลักการสิทธิมนุษยชนบางหลักการเป็นกรอบในการวิเคราะห์ โดยทำการวิเคราะห์การรายงานข่าวที่เกี่ยวข้องกับเรื่องพม่าในช่วงเวลาหนึ่งเดือนก่อนและหลังการเกิดเหตุการณ์ทั้งสอง โดยทำการศึกษาความถี่ เนื้อหาและภาษาที่ใช้ต่อการรายงานข่าวและการแสดงความคิดเห็นผ่านคอลัมน์ต่าง ๆ เปรียบเทียบระหว่างเหตุการณ์ทั้งสอง และระหว่างหนังสือพิมพ์ทั้งสามฉบับ

จากการศึกษาพบว่า หนังสือพิมพ์ทั้งสามฉบับได้แสดงทัศนคติในทางบวกต่อเหตุการณ์การยึดสถานทูตพม่ามากกว่าการยึดโรงพยาบาลราชบุรี และได้มีการอภิปรายถึงประเด็นด้านสิทธิมนุษยชนเพียงเล็กน้อยเท่านั้นต่อทั้งสองเหตุการณ์ ทัศนคติของหนังสือพิมพ์ที่มีต่อเหตุการณ์นี้เห็นได้ชัดว่าได้รับอิทธิพลจาก มุมมองของรัฐบาล จากลักษณะของผู้อ่าน และจากแหล่งข่าว พบว่า ไทยรัฐได้ใช้ถ้อยคำที่หือหวาต่อการรายงานข่าวและการเขียนคอลัมน์ ในขณะที่มติชนและ The Nation พยายามที่จะนำเสนออย่างกลาง ๆ

102 หน้า ISBN 974-04-5179-9

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Objectives of the Study	2
1.3 Research Questions	2
1.4 Significance	3
1.5 Research Method	3
1.6 Definition of Terms	6
1.7 Thesis Structure	7
2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	
2.1 Context of the Embassy and the Ratchaburi Hospital Events	8
2.2 Thai Attitudes Towards the Burmese	17
2.3 Media Sociology	20
2.4 Codes of Ethics	22
2.5 Media and Human Rights	24
3. THAI PRESS	
3.1 Thai Newspapers	27
3.2 Background of the Newspaper under Study	28

CONTENTS (Cont.)

3.3	Burmese Content in the Thai Press	31
3.4	Studies of Thai Media Representation	32
4.	NEWS REPORTING ON THE EMBASSY AND THE RATCHABURI HOSPITAL EVENTS	
4.1	One Month Periods before the Embassy and the Ratchaburi Hospital Events	34
4.2	One Month Periods after the Embassy and the Ratchaburi Hospital Events	38
4.3	Codes of Ethics and Human Rights and Media Sociology	59
5.	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
5.1	Conclusion	68
5.2	Recommendations	71
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	72
	APPENDIX:	
A.	Code of Ethics: Press Council of Thailand	76
B.	Code of Ethics: Thai Journalists Association	80
C.	Code of Ethics: Reporters Association of Thailand	82
D.	Chronology of Events	84
E.	Key Informants Interviews	89
	BIOGRAPHY	102

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
4.1 Number of items classified by type and newspaper for the 2 one-month periods before the Embassy and Hospital Event	35
4.2 Number of news items classified by type and newspaper in the period of one month after the start of the Embassy Event	38
4.3 Number of news items classified by type and newspaper for the 2 one-month periods before the Embassy and Hospital Events	42
4.4 Number of comment items on the Embassy Event by Month and Category of item	48
4.5 Number of comment items on the Ratchaburi Hospital Event by Month and Category of item	48

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Many violations of human rights are based on cases of discrimination. This is the case when an individual (or group of individuals) is treated in a way that is different from others because of that individual's race, gender, religion, language, or similar characteristic when this characteristic is not related to the form of discrimination.

Discrimination towards minorities exists in Thai society. Indigenous groups in the north and along the border, Thai Muslim people, and people from neighboring countries are subjected to this practice. The way these people are discriminated against is different depending on their race and nationality. People from Burma¹ are at present one of major groups that has suffered discrimination. There are many hundreds of thousands of them living on Thai soil. They come for two main reasons: to escape human rights violations by the Burmese authorities and to seek better economic opportunities.

Burmese face many forms of discrimination. This can be seen in day-to-day activities, such as marketing or using public transportation, to portrayals in school textbooks to government policy. Media also has an important responsibility in choosing to practice discrimination or not through the choice of language and content, since discrimination in the media can instigate or reinforce discrimination in the larger society.

Five years ago two important events initiated by Burmese occurred in Thailand, which gained much interest from the public and the media. These were the occupation of the Burmese Embassy on 1st of October 1999 and the occupation of Ratchaburi Provincial Hospital on 24th of January 2000. Since these two events were

¹ In this study 'Burma' is preferred to Myanmar, the new official name, for reasons of greater familiarity for Thais and remaining official name for opposition to present military government.

the most widely reported in the media, they have been chosen for study in order to examine the characteristics of the reporting by the Thai press of discrimination in the events.

The media operate under codes of ethics. Three codes of ethics for the Thai press are a tool of analysis: those of the Press Council of Thailand, of the Reporters Association of Thailand and of the Thai Journalists Association. Thai newspapers are expected to observe one or more of these codes. This study will examine how far the press followed the codes of conduct when reporting the two events.

The codes of ethics often conform to Human Rights instruments such as Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which declares the right to the presumption of innocence before the courts and tribunals, Article 20.2 of the ICCPR and Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination prohibit discrimination. This is to be discussed in chapter 2.

1.2 Objectives of the study

1. To analyse the representation of Burmese affairs in news reporting and commentary a month before and after each of the two events
2. To examine whether or not and in what way the Thai press follow the codes of ethics in their reporting and commentary on the two events
3. To evaluate the reporting of Human Rights violations by the press (for instance Article 14 and 20.2 of ICCPR)

1.3 Research questions

1. What are the similarities and differences in the way the newspapers report and comment on the two events?
2. Did the Thai newspapers comply with the press codes of ethics in their reporting and commentary on the two events?
3. How far did the Thai newspapers comply with the human rights instruments in their reporting and commentary on the two events?
4. Is there any change in the human rights attitude of the newspapers toward Burmese since these two events occurred?

5. What recommendations can be offered to the press in order to enhance their respect for the codes of conduct and human rights?
6. Is the media ethical in its reporting of human rights violations faced by the Burmese?

1.4 Significance

This study will enable us to gain more understanding about the work of the Thai press on Burmese issues, especially in crisis situations. It will also reveal the general concern of the press about codes of conducts and human rights in the process of news making. The results of the study may therefore be used by the press to strengthen their performance in this area. This in turn may lead to better understanding of the Burmese situation by the Thai public and hence better relations between the two countries. This study may benefit future academic research as well as those with an interest in Burmese issues.

1.5 Research Method

This study use content and textual analysis as well as key informants interviews as method. Content analysis is a means of trying to learn something about people by examining what they write (Berger, 1991: 25). It assumes that behavioral patterns, values, and attitudes found in the material reflect and affect the behavior, attitudes, and values of the people who create this material (Berger, 1991: 25). In this study, news reports and commentaries are assumed to reflect the behavior, attitudes and values of the media people who produce them. The basic idea is that an investigation of the message gives insights into the people who create the message (Berger, 1991: 27). And as these people are part of society, we can infer that behavior attitudes and values represent one set of beliefs within society. However, content analysis tends to focus on the frequency of phenomena, and so cannot reveal deeper meanings that occur within the language used. Textual analysis is an understanding of how a text creates meaning. So, textual analysis is used to provide deeper insights into what is written in the news. The key informants interviews is the third method in order

to understand the way of thinking of reporters toward Burmese issues as well as the two events.

So three methods are chosen because analyzing representation demands content and textual analysis. And in order to understand how codes of ethics are used, interviews of key informants are used.

(i) Content analysis

Three Thai newspapers are analyzed: *Thai Rath* and *Matichon*, which are published in Thai, and *The Nation*, which is published in English. The criteria for selecting these 3 newspapers are their differences in character and readership. *Thai Rath*, a ‘tabloid’ style, is the largest circulation newspaper and is aimed at the lowest common denominator of a mass market. *Matichon* is more ‘serious’ newspaper with a political focus and is oriented towards an educated readership. *The Nation* is an English-language newspaper targeted at well educated Thais and foreigners.

The daily newspaper editions that are analyzed in this study cover two periods, one for each event. Each period starts one month before the first day of the event and ends one month after the first day of the event. So, the first period covers 1 September 1999 to 31 October 1999 and the second period covers 24 December 1999 to 23 February 2000. The month before each event is studied in order to compare the reporting and commentary during a normal period and the period during and immediately after the events. In short, every issue of these 3 newspapers during the periods of 1 September 1999 to 31 October 1999 and 24 December 1999 to 23 February 2000 is analyzed. This amounts to 360 issues.

The content to be analyzed comprises items classified into news and comment. It does not include advertisements, photos, cartoons and photo captions. All news items that are relevant to Burma, Burmese and the Embassy and hospital sieges are counted and classified by type and date. The content of these items is recorded and analyzed. The frequency of items is compared according to the research questions. The text of selected important articles is analyzed and the research findings are discussed and analyzed based on the set conceptual approach.

(ii) Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is the way that words, sentences, set of sentences become tools of analysis. There are thoughts that wording could be interpret according to the background and culture of the group of people who use it. To understand the meaning behind is the way to understand the culture. The language the press use for Burmese and the two events can be analyzed and interpreted within the understanding of cultural framework. In the study the language to refer to Burmese peoples, the events, the occupiers, and other relevant words, phrases, sentences, and so on will be analyzed.

(iii) Key Informant Interviews

The purpose of interviews is to learn what newspaper writers and editors consciously think of their work. The population of the interviews is therefore reporters and editors.

Interviewees

Key informants are reporters and journalists whose work involved the events. Where possible, these are persons involved in the reporting and commentary on one or both of the events under study. They are mainly expected to describe the procedures used in presenting news, in making editorial decisions about what items to print, what information to include in each item, and what language to use in the reports. They are also questioned on procedures used to guarantee respect for human rights in reports and adherence to codes of conduct. Open-ended questions were used elicit their involvement in and opinions of the reporting and commentary of the events.

One reporter and one editor from Matichon and The Nation were interviewed. Because Thai Rath responded to a request for interviews that they have a policy not to allow reporters to give interviews, there was no interview from Thai Rath. Reporters and editors to be interviewed were selected based on their experience and professionalism on Burmese issues.

Interview questions

Interview questions dealt with three issues: a) What were the particular features (attitudes of reporters, constraints on reporting, influence of government policy, etc.) related to the reporting and commentary on each of the two events under study? b) What code of conduct does the newspaper follow and what are the procedures for implementing this and ensuring compliance? And c) What are the policies and procedures for ensuring that reporting and commentary respect human rights?

1.6 Definition of terms

News: Items containing factual information about a recent event or a recently changed situation. News items typically contain objective reports without the comments of the writer or editor (although they may report the opinions of persons involved in the news as part of the relevant factual information). However, as this thesis will later demonstrate, the decisions about what news items to publish, about what information to include in each item, and about what language to use, are not objective choices. News items are subclassified as follows:

Front Page Items: Items occurring on the front page of the first section of the newspaper. It is assumed that front page items are considered by the newspaper editors as of greater importance than other news items.

Following Page Items: Items occurring on any page of the newspaper other than the front page of the first section.

News is distinguished from comment in order to determine if discrimination is more prevalent in one category or the other.

Comment: Items that present opinions or comments on current news. Comment items may include factual information, including information not otherwise appearing in the newspaper, but the primary purpose of the item is to express opinion rather than to present factual information.

Editorial/Leader: An editorial or leader is a comment piece written anonymously by staff of the newspaper and representing the views of the newspaper.

Column: a column is a piece of writing with a column name and/or a named author (though the name is often a pen name). While the opinions expressed cannot be

assumed to be the same as those of the newspaper, the fact that the column was commissioned or selected for publication may reveal the attitude of the newspaper. Columns may be written by employees of the newspaper, or invited from outside persons, or re-printed from another source or agency. Examples of the last two types are referred to in this thesis as ‘guest columns’

Letters to the Editor: These are items written by members of the general public. As with columns, it cannot be assumed that the opinions of the letter writers are the same as those of the newspaper, although the choice of which letters to publish is an editorial decision. This was selected because they show 1) type of readership 2) the editorial policy of selecting particular viewers

Feature: A feature is a normally lengthier item, with a named author, and includes a mixture of factual information, often of a background nature, and opinion. The purpose is often to entertain as well as to inform. Frequency of feature shows the level of interest in the issue.

1.7 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 gives background information on Burmese politics, relations with Thailand and Thai attitudes towards Burmese. Details of the Embassy and Ratchaburi hospital events are also explained in this chapter as well as an introduction to media ethics and relevant human rights approaches. Chapter 3 gives an overview of Thai newspapers especially *Thai Rath*, *Matichon* and *The Nation*. Chapter 4 presents data analyzed by media ethics and human rights approaches. And finally chapter 5 contains the conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An understanding of the two events very much involves the political history of Burma, and the relationship between Thailand and Burma, in particular, Thai attitudes towards Burma. In this chapter I will present background information on the reasons behind the Embassy and the Ratchaburi hospital events. The Embassy and the Ratchaburi hospital events were both initiated by foreign armed groups from Burma, but the background of the group in each case is different, but linked

2.1 Context of the Embassy and the Ratchaburi hospital events

A. Historical Context of the Burmese Border Area

Burma, as its official name 'Union of Myanmar' implies, comprises numerous ethnic groups including the Burman, Shan, Karen, Kayah, Kachin, Chin, Mon, Wa, Kokang Chinese, and various smaller groups such as the Akha, Lahu, Lisu and Palong (Pornpimon 1999: 59). The Muslim Rohingya form a religiously distinct minority. Most minority groups are located along the borders. The Shan, Karen and Mon are the main ethnic groups located along the Thai-Burma border from north to south accordingly. Burma was the strongest state in Southeast Asia in the period before British colonization in 1885. The Kings of Burma defeated neighboring ethnic groups to expand the country. However the Burmese monarchy did not try to assimilate these ethnic groups. When the British Empire ruled Burma, it practiced a divide-and-rule policy of allowing minority groups limited autonomy. The British divided Burma into two parts, one Burma Proper where direct rule was practiced, while the second, the Frontier Areas, was ruled indirectly through ethnic minority leaders (Pornpimon 1999: 60). A group of Burmese student activists, who later became national leaders, such as

Aung San and U Nu were involved in political activities to free Burma by seeking assistance from Japan during World War II to expel the British. Japan occupied Burma during 1942-1945. Although Burma had a Burmese Prime Minister appointed by Japan, the Burmese found that Japan also sought political power over Burma. So Burmese leaders then sought assistance from the British to fight the Japanese. In 1945 Japan left Burma and in 1947 the British signed an agreement to give Burma independence the following year after establishing a constitution and elected government.²

Aung San, a leader of Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), a leading party, tried to unify Burma by inviting representatives of minority groups to join the process of forming a government. A meeting with minority leaders was held in February 1947 at Panglong town in Shan State. There were 34 Shan Chao Fah³, representatives of the Kachin, Chin and Kayah, and U Nu (later Prime Minister) from the Burman majority. Representatives of the Karen and Mon were invited as observers.⁴

The main contents of the Panglong Agreement were that Burma and the minority groups would join together as a Union, that Shan and Kayah States had the right to declare independence after ten years of the Union, and that the Kachin did not have the right to independence but self autonomy. The Karen wanted independence and were to discuss this with the British directly (Pornpimon 1999).

The Karen, a group mentioned to involve with both the Embassy and the Ratchaburi hospital events; have played an important role in Burmese affairs since independence. The British supported the Karen in many ways, such as education and employment. Religious groups also came to convert them from animism to Christianity. Religion has been a factor in Karen affairs in later times.⁵

God's Army, a group that was thought to be responsible for the Ratchaburi Hospital event in 2000, is a Karen organization. Supposedly headed by cheroot-

² For more about the history of independence in Burma, see Charnvit 2001, Pornpimon 1999, Steinberg, 1982,

³ *Chao Fah* means king of the state.

⁴ Trichot, 1999 p. 28-29 quoting Silverstein, *Burma Politics*, p. 105

⁵ The Karen forces are divided into two main religious groups. The KNU is a Christian army opposing the Burmese military government, and the DKBA is a Buddhist army, which takes the government side. See more in Trichot 1999.

smoking teenage twin boys, it claims mystical powers for its supporters. It is not thought to be a significant actor in border affairs, although its bizarre nature gave it wide notoriety.

Burma gained independence on January 4, 1948, with the Karen themselves split into two different groups. Some were satisfied with a Karen state under the constitution of the Union of Burma. Some chose to set up a political movement to negotiate with the government and also establish an armed force to protect the Karen people (Pornpimon 1999: 33). The Karen National Union (KNU) was established as Burma was preparing for independence. The KNU aimed to separate Karen State from Burma and started its political activities since then.

The Karen people in Burma are spread along the Thai-Burma border opposite Tak, Kanchanaburi, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi and Prachuab Kirikhan provinces of Thailand. (There is also a Thai Karen population in these provinces, some with Thai citizenship.) The Karen has fought with the Burmese central government since Burmese independence until now. The geography of Karen areas is militarily difficult.

Burma has since independence faced constant political difficulty. The civilian government of PM U Nu between 1948 and 1958 was not peaceful. His intention was to have a single government with all ethnic people having political equality with the Burmans. But the minority groups disagreed so conflict ensued. The country fell into chaos so U Nu asked the military to maintain order in the country during 1958-1960. A short-lived civilian government then continued for another 2 years and then the military took power in 1962 under General Ne Win.

Instead of improving conditions in Burma, the military worsened them. General Ne Win declared the 'Burmese Way to Socialism' with the intention of turning Burma into a better and more moral society (Bhansoon 1999: 32). This policy was founded on the belief that institutions such as parliamentary democracy had been tried in Burma but was not only unsuccessful in reaching the goal of socialist development, but also deviated from socialism (Bhansoon 1999: 33-34). The Burmese military were deeply antagonistic to British colonialism, capitalism and economic dependence (Bhansoon 1999: 35).

The Burmese military government has its own definition of socialism. Noranith Sethabutr made an interesting suggestion.

1. The military was dissatisfied with parliamentary democracy which tried independence from the British and saw that this system could not solve the economic and political problems of Burma. When democracy was not needed, Burmese military wanted to use its power to rule the country and to make the government stable. This is dictatorship, but they were afraid of being criticized for making no progress or 'going back to the canal'⁶ if they openly announced dictatorship.

2. The word 'socialism' is familiar to the Burmese. It was used since U Nu was Prime Minister. The military junta tried to create a common understanding that Burmese socialism consists of democracy. The revolutionary council declared that a 'socialist democratic state' would encourage the success of a 'socialist economy' (Noranith, quoted in Bhansoon 1999: 36).

So, socialism in the Burmese junta's definition is actually not a kind of integration between socialism and Buddhism as was the initial intention of the Burmese Socialist People Party (BSPP). It was more likely to be dictatorship in international understanding. This form of rule created economic and political struggles in Burma until the 1988 uprising.

In 1988 the Burmese economy was again in crisis. Gross Domestic Product shrank by 11.4% and the country had only 30 million dollars in reserve. The economic crisis created a political problem. The situation caused disappointment among students and other people, which started in 1987. Clashes started in March 1988 and reached their peak in August when millions of Burmese demonstrated for democracy. Thousands lost their lives in violence perpetrated by the government. Although the situation was brought under control by the military government, it led to drastic changes in Burmese politics and economics. This indicated the failure of Ne Win's 'Burmese Way to Socialism' policy (Bhansoon 1999: 52).

These economic, political and social problems created internal conflicts between the government and the ethnic minority groups and between the government and its political opponents (NLD, students). Since the ruling military junta allowed no space for political discussion, disagreements quickly polarized into armed conflict and

⁶ Thai idiom meaning 'going back to the dark ages'.

brutal repression. The result was an influx into neighboring countries (some into Bangladesh and India but the vast majority into Thailand) of ethnic minorities, who mostly end up as refugees and migrant workers, students, who become activists, and the political opposition, who continue their activities in exile.

B. Contemporary relationships between Burmese and Thais

Generally people from Burma in Thailand can be classified into 4 groups which are migrant workers, refugees, political oppositions and student activists. These groups are not exhaustive but they demonstrate the major groups which are reported in the media.

Migrant workers have varied in numbers according to source estimating between 300,000 to 700,000. It is claimed that they come for economic reasons but actually many of them also have faced rights problem. They work in many fields: agriculture, fishing, factories, domestic service, etc. Even with wages cheaper than those paid to Thais, it is still better than living in their homeland (Pornasuk: 1998). This group attracts most media attention.

There are about 100,000 refugees belonging to the Karen, Karenni, Mon, and other minorities in 9 camps along the Thai-Burma border. Most refugees are forced to leave Burma because they face human rights violations such as forced relocation, forced labor, rape, torture and killing. However, the Thai government does not regard them as 'refugees' but 'displaced persons from fighting'. The refugee camps are called 'temporary shelters' according to the government. The Ministry of Interior permits some international non-governmental organizations such as the Burma Border Consortium (BBC) and Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) to give humanitarian assistance to these refugees.

Members of the political opposition range from Burmese politicians that oppose the military junta to ethnic opposition groups or parties. These people have come to Thailand to continue their political struggle. Since the Thai government officially maintains diplomatic relations with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) (the present name of the ruling military junta), opposition groups have to work very carefully and be aware of the political sensitivity between Thailand

and Burma. They have to find a way to carry out activities without displeasing the Thai authorities. So what they can do is mostly training or educational programs.

There were about 10,000 student activists, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Thai authorities through the Ministry of Interior (MOI) did provide a student shelter at Maneeloy camp in Ratchaburi province. This shelter was for students registered with the UNHCR waiting resettlement in third countries. Maneeloy camp is now closed as the MOI has announced that there are no more student activists in Thailand. Some students who have not yet been resettled have been sent to refugee camps. Many of these students still continue their political activities in Thailand.

C. Embassy Occupation 1 October 1999

Since the 18 September 1988 coup, the military has been ruling by martial law, under the name of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The SLORC has brutally suppressed all dissent, killing hundreds, perhaps thousands, in the effort, and forcing some ten thousand students to flee to the borders, where several thousand still remain. Arrests have continued sporadically. (Steinberg 1990: p.3)

Burmese students fled the central regime with the help of minority groups along the border before some entered neighboring countries including Thailand. The Mon and Karen were main helpers on the Thai border, and the KNU was one of the main groups that gave significant assistance to these students. Students received accommodation, food and military training from these ethnic groups.

The students did many kinds of activities to restore democracy in Burma. The types of activities depended on geography. In ethnic areas along the border they set up armed groups and conducted armed conflict with the Burmese military. However, this kind of activity has declined as they realized little success and less support from international sources.⁷ They also helped ethnic people in education and general matters.

In Thailand, Burmese students came for two reasons: either to seek refugee status or to continue political activities by using Thailand as a base. Their campaign

⁷ Irrawaddy journal has regular reports on Burmese students' armed activities.

activities range from political to cultural events. Some of them demonstrate in front of the Burmese Embassy and other relevant embassies and agencies, launch political statements, hold seminars and other memorial ceremonies, arrange cultural performances and produce campaign souvenirs such as T-shirts, banners, stickers, etc.

Some students stay in Thailand illegally but most of them are registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as 'Persons of Concern'. UNHCR, with the support of the Thai Ministry of Interior set up a shelter for these students at Ban Maneeloy, Suan Phueng district, Ratchaburi province.

Before the Embassy event Thai newspapers reported the possibility of a 9-9-99 event. The Burmese believe that the number nine is a lucky number. Some Burmese students in Thailand did some activities on that day but it turned out that neither the movements inside Burma nor those in Thailand were able to shake the Burmese military government.

Some Burmese students in Thailand decided to occupy the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok on 1 October 1999. They called themselves 'Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors'. It was a newly founded group. The reasons for the occupation were announced through a prepared statement appearance on the front page of *The Nation*. They demanded the unconditional release of Burmese political prisoners, a dialogue between the Burmese junta and pro-democracy politicians and the convening of the parliament elected in May 1990. (*The Nation*, 2 October 1999 front page)

The armed occupiers took hostage embassy staff and members of the public who happened to be in the Embassy at the time of the raid. The members of the public were largely foreigners applying for visas, some of whom seemed to have background understanding of the situation in Burma and the motivation of the occupiers. Negotiations with the Thai authorities were almost continuous and the civilian authorities, as well as the security forces, were involved. The press had relatively good access to the occupiers. A number of the hostages clearly sympathized with the occupiers and helped secure their safety during their removal from the embassy. Eventually, the Deputy Foreign Minister, MR Sukhumbhand Paribatra, was exchanged for the hostages in return for safe passage by helicopter to the Thai-Burma border. After almost 48 hours the event ended peacefully. The Deputy Foreign Minister was

released safe. The raiders were released at the border in Ratchaburi province in an area that is understood to be a KNU area.

D. Ratchaburi Hospital Occupation, 24 January 2000

Three months later on 24 January 2000, a second armed group from Burma occupied Ratchaburi provincial hospital. The group came from an area inside Burma occupied by armed Karen groups, including God's Army, near to the point where the occupiers of the Embassy had been released. Although the occupiers were identified in reports as belonging to God's Army, this is doubtful.

The motive for the occupation was to draw attention to the alleged shelling by the Thai military of groups of internally displaced⁸ Karen inside Burma. These groups contained both civilians and armed forces. There were reports confirming the shelling, with resulting deaths and injuries. The reason for the shelling was officially given as protection of Thai territorial integrity. Some reporters and commentators however believe that the shelling may have been an effort by the Thai military to punish the occupiers of the Burmese Embassy.⁹ The shelling had not been widely reported in the media and consequently there was no questioning of the Thai military's motives for this.

The occupation seems to have been largely unplanned. The armed group crossed the border and hi-jacked an early morning bus to Ratchaburi provincial town for apparently no better reason than that was the regular destination of the bus. In the town, the occupiers took over the hospital since they reportedly wanted medical care for their compatriots who had been injured by Thai shelling.

⁸ The UN working definition of *International Displaced Persons (IDPs)* that persons/groups of persons who have been forced to flee / to leave their home or places of habitual residence as a result of, or in order to avoid, particularly, the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international recognized state border. Another definition from the Global IDP Survey definition is that IDPs are people who are forced to flee or to leave their homes or places, as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of: armed conflict; situations of generalized violence; violations of human rights; or natural or man-made disasters; and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

⁹ Personal communication with a reporter who has requested anonymity.

The hospital covers an extensive complex of buildings and it was impossible for the small number of Karen to secure a perimeter. Many in the hospital were able to flee. Those who remained were those unable to move, staff who stayed to care for them, and a small number of persons detained by force or threat of force as hostages. It is assumed that undercover security personnel were able to enter the compound with weapons.

Negotiations with the Thai authorities were mediated mostly by the security forces. Media access to the occupiers was restricted. Many reports were based on the testimony of persons who escaped from the hospital compound.

Before dawn on the second day all media were summoned to a Thai government press briefing, but instead locked inside a building. An assault was made on the hospital. All the raiders died in the operation. Some eyewitness reports at the time claimed that at least some of the occupiers surrendered, were ordered to remove their uniforms and summarily executed. This is denied by the Thai authorities.

Although both incidents involve armed Burmese occupying buildings in Thailand, there are considered important differences between the 2 events:

- A. The embassy occupation technically did not involve Thai territory. The hospital occupation involved a Thai government building.
- B. The occupiers of the embassy had a clear propaganda motive and were able to articulate this. The occupiers of the hospital had a message, but did not seem to have planned how to articulate this.
- C. The embassy occupiers received sympathy from their foreign hostages, who facilitated negotiations and assisted in the resolution of the occupation. The hospital occupiers appear to have received none, possibly because the hospital inmates were ordinary Thais with little understanding of the issues¹⁰.
- D. The embassy situation involved the civilian Thai authorities as well as the security forces. The hospital situation was managed largely by the Thai military.
- E. The media were able to contact the occupiers of the embassy and some of the negotiations were conducted via a phone-in radio station. Contact with the

¹⁰ Don Pathan, The Nation, personal communication.

hospital occupiers was less easy and actively obstructed by the Thai authorities.

- F. The embassy event came first. This meant that any element of the Thai authorities who felt that this event had been mishandled would be striving to prevent a repeat in the hospital incident.

2.2 Thai attitudes towards the Burmese

Nationalism plays an important role in the attitude of Thais toward Burmese. Dr Sunait Chutintaranond, a historian at Chulalongkorn University, premises that the image of the Burmese in the eyes of the Thais is one of evil, demons or agents of dark forces. But this image of the Burmese first as the enemy of the Buddhist faith and later on as the enemy of the Thai nation did not originate by chance. It has been deliberately implanted and shaped by the Thai ruling class and even by learned monks since the early Rattanakosin period. (The Sunday Nation, June 9, 2002 p.1A)

Thais and Burmese have been developing mutually distrustful attitudes in various ways. At the government level the Burmese junta believes that the Thai government has supported ethnic rebel groups along Thai-Burma border. It is generally assumed that the Thai government and/or military saw armed ethnic minorities as a useful buffer against the Burmese central government and were prepared to give discrete support to such groups as long as they did not create unmanageable problems (e.g. refugees, drugs, etc) for Thailand.

The general Thai public does not have a positive attitude towards Burmese. There are at least two factors that encourage this negative feeling. The first one is the representation of history that been used in order to strengthen the nation-state. The second one is the present situation of Burma that leads to a lot of domestic and border problems. The huge migration of Burmese for both economic and political reasons is the outcome.

The historical perspective of Thais toward Burmese is very much involved with historiography. Academic historians note that people tend to perceive the history of neighboring countries in part not in total in order to form attitudes towards them. This partial history is the way Thais perceive relations with Burma. It means that Thais select certain historical facts to explain their relationship. The two defeats of

Ayutthaya (in 1569 and 1767) by the Burmese is repeatedly recounted to symbolize the feeling of Thais toward Burmese. Particularly the 1767 sacking of Ayutthaya is remembered when the Burmese burnt the city and its marvelous temples to the ground. The Burmese commanders-in-chief, Mahanaw Ratha and Thihapate are portrayed as villains, showing no interest at all in accepting a total surrender by King Ekkathat, the last king of Ayutthaya (The Sunday Nation, 9 June 2002, 2A) *The Nation* newspaper commented in a report under the title ‘Are we too far gone in our hatred of Burma?’:

Two hundred and thirty-five years after the sacking of Ayutthaya by the Burmese, the Thais today still refer to that haunting tragedy with pain in their hearts. The trauma runs deep in the national psyche, with the Burmese being cast as the evil enemy of the Thai nation. (The Sunday Nation, 9 June 2002, front page)

It is showing that the Burmese are not well represented in Thai media. This similar kind of attitude also expresses by Neumann (2001)

A series of wars with Burmese kingdoms eventually doomed Ayutthaya. The city was sacked, and its people dispersed or deported to Burma in 1767. Interestingly, this is not ancient history in Thailand. Newspapers frequently carry detailed stories and analyses of the Ayutthaya-Burma wars as if the events took place in recent memory. A popular historical movie in 2000 celebrated the wars against Burma from this period. (Neumann 2001: 4)

This part of history has been reproduced in government campaigns, the formal education system and the mass media. Secondary school textbooks in civics (sociology) follow this approach. Government agencies such as the military and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare launched a campaign during 1999-2000 on the dangers of immigrant workers by producing calendars, placards, and posters. One calendar from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare in 1999 showed migrant workers as poison snakes. The entertainment business also helped to promote awkward feelings between Thais and Burmese. The film *Bang Rajan* (2001) showed *Bang Rajan* villagers fighting bravely against powerful Burmese armies in 1767.¹¹ The

¹¹ *Bang Rachan* was a very successful movie. It earned more than 100 million Baht.

movie amplified the courage of a small group of villagers and the brutality of the Burmese. A famous Burmese actress refused to talk to the producer of this movie when they met at the Pan-Asian film festival in 2001.

When the Thai film *Bang Rajan* – which featured scenes of Burma’s 18th century invasion of the Thai Kingdom – was screened at a Pan-Asia film festival in France in early 2001, Eindra Kyaw Zin stormed out of the theater before the film’s end. Its director, Thanit Jitnukul, who took home the festival’s Best Director award, recounted meeting Eindra Kyaw Zin that day. “She was very friendly at first,” Thanit said. “Then she asked me about my movie. I told her its name, and she refused to talk to me again” (“no kissing cousins” 2003: 28).

The mass media play a very important role in maintaining a culture of discrimination. Dr. Sunait, a Burmese historian professor, comments on the mass media:

Thereafter the mass media, consciously or unconsciously, have carried on this task of branding the Burmese as the enemy who cannot be trusted for their unforgivable plundering of Ayutthaya (Thanong 2002: 1).

In order to strengthen a sense of superiority as well as nationalism, demonizing the Burmese is one strategy to make Thais feel proud of their nation. In addition, the differences in the present political and economic situation of Thailand and Burma encourage this sense of superiority. Dr. Sunait also suggested:

As for Thais’ image of the Burmese in the present day, it has hardly changed, at least in the fundamental sense. The Burmese are still perceived as the enemy in various dimensions. But the image and the stereotype are always formed on the basis of Thai superiority (Thanong 2002: 2)

Burmese are regarded from the Thai perspective as drug dealers, potential criminals, and sources of disease. There is also a belief that the media play a part in enhancing the negative image of the Burmese as Natee states.

Academics at a seminar held in Chiang Mai hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the same issue around the middle of last year pointed out that the reason behind the Thai people's dislike of Burma was spurred on by the media as well as the entertainment industry (Natee 2002: 5).

Such an accusation brings into question the neutrality and fairness of the Thai media.

2.3 Media sociology

The media sociology approach considers that factors such as organizational routines, social institutions, ideology of those in power in society, etc. influence media performance. A media sociology approach is useful to explain why the media present information in a certain way.

The media have a strong influence on the public. In addition, there are many human rights declarations that address the importance of the media and guide media conduct. But the media sometimes are not able to practice these notions properly because of various factors. These factors can be generalized by the concept of media sociology and media ethical dilemmas.

Media sociology shows that there are many factors that influence media performance. News is not free from personal attitudes or other intentional or unintentional factors. According to Gans (1979) and Gitlin (1980) these categories can be used for analyzing the media performance towards the hostage events.

The variety of ways that society influences media representatives can be summarized in the following categories. These categories are not exclusive, as the media may be affected by more than one category at a time. The usefulness of these categories is to show the variety of ways the media relates to social pressures. In my research I find different newspapers are impacted by different social factors. The following categories are taken from the work of Gans and Gitlin.

A. Content reflects social reality with little or no distortion

The *mirror* approach to content research assumes that the mass media conveys an accurate reflection of social reality to the audience - like a television camera turned on the world. The *null effects* approach similarly suggests that media content reflects

reality, but sees this reality as the result of compromises between those who sell information to the media and those who buy it; these forces counteracting one another and producing an objective portrayal of events. Thai Rath tends to this relationship because it is a more populist paper.

The content of news in the press seems to accord with what the readers expect to read rather than what they really need to know.

B. Content is influenced by media workers' socialization and attitudes

This *communicator-centered* approach suggests that psychological factors intrinsic to communications personnel - their professional, personal, and political attitudes, and the professional training communicators receive - lead them to produce a social reality in which agreement among social groups is the norm, and in which new ideas or behaviors are treated as undesirable oddities. This approach predicts that communicators will portray deviant people or groups as eccentricities that reasonable people will not take seriously.

As mentioned earlier, Thais in general stereotype the Burmese as poor, dirty, oriented to violence, and so on. Thai media people can be influenced by these stereotypes intentionally or unintentionally.

C. Content is influenced by media routines

The *organizational routines* approach argues that media content is influenced by the ways in which communications workers and their companies organize work. For example, news reporters are taught to write stories in the *inverted pyramid*, putting what they consider the most important information first and organizing the rest in descending order of importance. The journalist's assessment therefore determines the content of the story.

Thai newspapers function in a society where seniority is respected. Duncan McCargo (2000) has studied politics and the press in Thailand. He found that the editorial desk, normal staffed by senior ex-reporters, has an influence on shading the news in accordance with their organizational attitude. Further, following routines means that there is little investigative journalism in Thailand.

D. Content is influenced by other social institutions and forces

This approach suggests that factors external to the communicator and the organization - economic and cultural forces, and audience - determine content. The *market* approach, for example, locates influence in the communicators' desire to give audiences what they want in order to ensure large audiences for sponsors' products; the *social responsibility* approach locates influence in the communicators' desire to give audiences what it is assumed they need rather than what they want. Other forces in Thai are the military, the monarchy, and certain government agencies. Reports tend to follow ministerial press releases. The influence of the government on Thai media is very important, and this is demonstrated in the reporting of the Embassy and Hospital events.

E. Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo

Hegemony is a broad theoretical approach suggesting that media content is influenced by the ideology of those in power in society. As key parts of the economic system that are controlled by those with economic power, the mass media carry an ideology consistent with those interests, which helps ensure that society will continue in its present form.

2.4 Codes of Ethics

The ethical dilemma is another factor that prevents good media performance. There are also situations that bring media people into ethical dilemmas. The media's performance is not only based on professionalism but professional ethics. Society might be harmed by the poor ethical judgement of the media. "Journalists as a group are no more likely to exploit their positions than people in other professions, but when journalists make the wrong ethical choices, the consequence can be very damaging." (Kayoko Mizuta: 2000) Normally, media people conduct their work ethically. All media people are required to follow institutional codes of conduct.

A. Ethical Dilemmas

The codes of ethics are the moral standards for reporters and journalists. However, in many cases media people have to face ethical dilemmas where it is difficult to make the right decision for doing their work. According to Shirley Biagi (1990) there are four categories of the ethical dilemmas for the media: **truthfulness, fairness, privacy** and **responsibility**. These can be summarized as follows.

Truthfulness is not just reporting the truth but avoiding *misrepresentation* and *disinformation*. Misrepresentation is where reporters change some part of the truth for some reason. Disinformation involves government officials or other power-holders trying to use the media for their own benefits.

Fairness is a reasonable, right and just way of reporting news. It also implies impartiality in which journalists do not take or receive anything for personal gain or hidden benefits for both the journalists themselves and the people they write about. The concept of fairness is related to *insider friendship*, *conflict of interest* and *checkbook journalism*.

Insider friendship is the situation when journalists develop close relationships with the people they write about and may use that relationship to gain professional benefits. *Conflict of interest* is where journalists receive personal benefits such as gifts or money from sources, sponsors, or advertisers. *Checkbook journalism* is the payment to their sources for news.

Privacy is also a difficult dilemma. The line between privacy and publicity is blurred particularly with respect to news of public figures. This issue is not relevant to this study because the events studied do not involve public figures or individual privacy.

Public **responsibility** refers to reporters' duty to report the situation. However, in some situations it is difficult to distinguish between the role of a reporter and a human being.

B. Codes of Ethics for Thai media

Whereas newspapers are not the signatories to human rights treaties, they can be expected to follow the codes of ethics that have been developed within the profession. The codes of ethics used in this thesis are from the Thai Journalist

Association, the Reporters Association of Thailand, and the Press Council of Thailand.¹² They share main principles but some are more detailed.

The codes of ethics of the Reporters Association of Thailand and the Thai Journalists Association share very similar contents which are

- a) To promote freedom of expression;
- b) To provide truthful, accurate news, with an obligation to correct news found to be inaccurate;
- c) To be polite and honest in presenting news, documents or photographs;
- d) To respect confidentiality of news sources; and
- e) To be free from the influence of any individuals or interest groups.

However the Thai Journalists Association adds one more point, which is to avoid any act that damage to the profession's integrity and image.

The code of ethics of the Press Council of Thailand has more points dealing with various aspects of the profession 30 items are grouped under 4 sections, entitled 'general'; 'code of ethics and guidelines for newspapers'; 'code of ethics for reporters' and one section with no title. From these 30 items there are 3 that are directly relevant to this study:

Item 6: Newspapers must be fair to all parties mentioned in the news stories.

Item 9: Newspapers must refrain from putting the opinion of the individual reporter in the news article.

Item 15: Newspapers must take into consideration humanitarian principles and the dignity of an individual person when he or she is being presented in a photograph or mentioned in a news story.

Ethical codes differ from human rights because they are not international standards, nor legally binding.

2.5 Media and human rights

Human rights have been codified in order to oblige states to protect the rights of members of each state. The state must provide proper mechanisms to implement these

¹² See Appendix for full texts. The Bangkok Post newspaper also has an in-house code of ethics.

rights. Social organs such as the media should also be aware of their role in the protection of human rights.

Kayoko Mizuta (2000) suggests that the media can reach the unreachable groups of society, including the poor and people living in rural and remote areas. The media is also powerful in: (1) promoting knowledge through providing information about human rights; (2) harnessing values and attitudes through promoting a human rights culture; and (3) inducing action through encouraging people to defend human rights and prevent human rights abuses.

The relationship between the media and human rights is complex. Firstly, the media have a duty to report cases of human rights violations. Secondly, the media can promote human rights by taking a public stance on violations. Thirdly, the media themselves can violate human rights in the way they report the news.

The human rights instruments relevant to the duty of the media to report cases of human rights violations and to promote human rights are Article 3 and Article 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); Article 14 and Article 20.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Article 3 of the UDHR states “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”. The response of some Thai media to apparent violations of this right by the Thai authorities seems to condone these violations.

The right to the presumption of innocence is provided in Article 11 of the UDHR and in Article 14 of the ICCPR, which guarantee that people accused of a criminal offence are presumed innocent until proved guilty in a public trial.

The prohibition of discrimination is a key standard in international human rights. It is the peremptory norm that prohibits discrimination on the basis of such factors as race, ethnic origin, religion or nationality (Mizuta 2000: 92). This prohibition is stated in Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Article 20.2 of the ICCPR.

The media performance in the hostage events is to be investigated on these terms. The study will examine whether the media respect the presumption of innocence and non-discrimination.

Article 19 of the UDHR and Article 19 (3) of the ICCPR relate to the third aspect of the relation between the media and human rights which is that the media themselves can violate human rights in the way they report the news.

Article 19 of the UDHR emphasizes the role of the state in guaranteeing the right to freedom of opinion and expression of an individual.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

However freedom of opinion and expression must comply with the rule of law.

Article 19 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) sets special duties and responsibilities for individuals exercising this right.

The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and necessary. (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (order public), or of public health or morals.

The interpretation of these restrictions is not easy particularly within Thai context. The Burmese are sometimes considered as a threat to Thai national security according to Thai government. Actually, the concept of the protection of national security or of public order (order public), or public health or morals is not clearly defined and can be used as a tool to deny human rights.

CHAPTER 3

THAI PRESS

3.1 Thai Newspapers

The press in Thailand is one of the most powerful in the developing world (Neumann: 2001). McCargo says that newspapers report freely and comment critically on all aspects of politics. The press is one of the most dynamic elements in Thai civil society (McCargo 2000: 1). However, the freedom of the press has been changed much since the present government.

According to McCargo, there are four kinds of Thai language newspaper: mass-circulation papers emphasizing crime stories and sensationalism (led by *Thai Rath*, *Daily News* and, later, *Khao Sot*) ‘quality’ papers which place primary emphasis on politics and economics (*Matichon*, *Siam Rath* and, for a while, *Siam Post*) business newspapers (led by *Phujatkan Daily* and *Krungthep Thurakit*) and vanity papers run as pet projects, usually by wealthy individuals with political interests (such as the *Daily Mirror*, *Dao Sayam* and *Ban Muang*) (McCargo 2000: 32).

Thai language newspapers are subject to a cycle of birth and death. They are not normally influenced by government power but are subject to the wishes of their owners. Some newspapers are owned by persons currently or formerly involved with politics such as *Naew Na*, owned by Gen Prasong Soonsiri, and *Siam Rath*, once owned by former PM M.R. Kukrit Pramoj and now by Chatchawan Kong-udom, a Bangkok senator and reportedly owner of illegal casinos in Bangkok. These newspapers are sometimes used for the political benefit of their owners. However, other newspapers cannot be said to be free from political interference.

Thai newspapers tend to have a similar structure. They are divided into sections which comprise local news, international news, (domestic) politics, business, society, entertainment, and sport. Every Thai newspaper has these sections in different

proportions depending on the type of newspaper. Additional sections in some newspapers are health, culture, children, and technology. Interestingly, mass circulation newspapers have several pages of synopsis of TV soap operas.

There are news items addressing human rights issues from time to time but there is no specific section called rights, human rights or anything similar. Human rights news or analysis is not a focus of attention of Thai newspapers.

The Nation and *Bangkok Post* are the two significant long-standing English language newspapers in Thailand. They resemble each other but differ from the Thai language press, containing a lot more international news. More than 30% of the English-language newspapers is international news while Thai newspapers have only one or two pages. The English-language newspapers sometimes have a section called human rights which does not happen in Thai newspapers. Not only expats but also educated Thais read the English-language newspapers, as can be seen by the fact that they carry advertisements in Thai.

3.2 Background of the Newspapers under Study

3.2.1 Character of studied newspapers

A. *Thai Rath*

Thai Rath is the most popular newspaper in Thailand. Its circulation is 1,000,000 per day for approximately 25,000,000 readers.¹³ The newspaper is divided into 2 parts for 40 pages. The first 20 pages consist of news items and columns. The second part consists of sports news, entertainment and synopses of TV soap operas. The regular layout of Thai Rath is that Page 1 contains leading news items, each normally consisting of a headline, picture, opening paragraph and reference to a run-on on a later page. The front page also contains one article printed in a frame with the heading 'Scoop'. This is not normally a 'scoop' in the accepted sense of the word (an exclusive story), but simply a way of drawing the readers' attention to the item.

¹³ Thai Rath Homepage, www.thairath.co.th

Burmese news may be presented in two parts of the newspaper. Events that happen in Burma are presented as foreign news while any news related to Burma or the Burmese that happens in Thailand is treated as local news. The sources of foreign news are not mentioned but some items refer to the *New Light of Myanmar*, a newspaper owned by the military government.

B. *Matichon*

Matichon is ranked fifth in circulation after *Thai Rath*, *Daily News*, *Khom Chat Luek* and *Khao Sot* (Judprakai 2004) These 4 larger circulation newspapers are tabloids in terms of content, so *Matichon* is the biggest circulation newspaper. However, the official circulation number is confidential. There are 24 pages. *Matichon* targets an urban Bangkok audience; hence there is a page for urban community news which does not appear in the other newspapers under study. Foreign news appears on pages 16, 18 or 24. The normal space devoted to foreign news is half a page consisting of various news items from around the world. Burmese news is normally presented in this section. Sources of foreign news are not always mentioned. To judge from the content, it seems to be translated and summarized from international agencies.

C. *The Nation*

The Nation is one of two local English newspapers. The number of pages is between 52 and 56. It is divided into 4 sections: A – news, B – business, C – lifestyle and culture, and a classified section. Section A comprises 14 pages: the front page; one page with the editorial, in-house columns and letters to the editor; one page for guest and in-house opinion columns; and 2-4 pages each for local, regional, world and sports news. Section B is divided into local, regional, Asian, and world news, and stock market and other financial tables. Section C, lifestyle and culture, consists of society news, features, calendar of events, astrology, cartoons, movies and puzzles, and arts news. Special features appear on weekends. There are also special sections for each day of the week, i.e. education news, learning English, computer news, auto, etc.

Sources of news are both local and international. Wire services are often used such as that of *The Straits Times*, and the international agencies Reuters, Agence

France–Presse (AFP), Associated Press (AP), Deutsche Presse–Agentur, and Inter Press Service. The target audience of The Nation comprises well educated Thais, and the expatriate community. Burmese news is presented under either local or regional news.

3.2.2 Character of columns from studied newspapers

Columns in these three newspapers have different characters. Regular columnists are seen in Thai Rath and Matichon more than The Nation, while The Nation has columns presented on two pages, either the editorial or op-ed page. On the editorial page, columnists are from the editorial team. Each of them produces a column approximately once a week. The op-ed page has columns from The Nation staff themselves, guest columnists and international sources. Regular columnists in Thai Rath and Matichon are mostly experienced reporters who have worked for the newspaper for a number of years. They have fixed spaces in the layout. Thai Rath has altogether 6 columns while Matichon also has 6. The important ones that concern this study are:

Thai Rath

a) *Poet faa song look* (Open the sky to look at the world), by Nitiphoom Naowarat on page 2. It is a column about the experience of Nitiphoom in foreign countries.

b) *Samnak khao hua khiaw* (Fly on the wall news) appears on the front page with a run-on run on in page 2 or 3. It presents a critical view current important issue. It is unusual in being the only column to appear on the front page in any of the newspapers under study.

c) *Mangkong haa lep* (Five-clawed dragon) is in the right corner of page 3. It expresses the comment of a senior reporter and is normally written in a sensational style.

d) *Maihet prathet thai* (Thailand footnote) gives the opinion of an unnamed columnist on current issues.

e) *He ha pha thi* (Laughing, talking) is also the opinions of an unnamed columnist on current issues.

f) *Klaa dai klaa sia* (Dare to take, dare to loose) normally criticizes the performance of police authorities.

Matichon

a) *Mong look jaak mum thai* (Thai perspective on the world) appears in the foreign news section. It serves to analyze foreign news.

b) *Nai huay yot* (Mr Huay Yot) gives general comments.

c) *Doen naa chon*, (Frontal attack) (various writers) expresses general comments.

d) *Choeng-at sathanakan* (Situation notes) expresses general comments.

e) *Maat chalo* (Smooth talk) is written in short sentences in a sarcastic style.

f) *Ruangchai Sarniran* is the name of the column and columnist.

The various columns have developed their own styles and readership, but these differences are not important for the purposes of this study, with the exception of *Mong look jaak mum thai* of Matichon, which has a focus on foreign issues, and *Mangkon haa lep* of Thai Rath which makes frequent use of sensational language.

3.3 Burmese Content in the Thai Press

In the Thai press, Burmese affairs are mainly represented through the following issues:

a) The situation along the Thai-Burma border. This mostly features fighting between the Rangoon junta and ethnic forces, which also creates the refugee problem.

b) Drugs. The Thai government has made methamphetamine suppression a major policy. The border area between the two countries is known to be an important source of this drug. There is news about individuals or groups from Burma that produce, transport, and sell methamphetamines to Thailand. There are also reports of the fighting between Thai troops and drug dealers from Burma.

c) Migrant workers. This issue has become a regular news item in Thai newspapers since the Banharn Silapa-archa government in 1996 passed a cabinet resolution to

permit migrant workers from neighboring countries. However, a year later, the resolution had to be cancelled because of the economic crisis in Thailand. At that time there were approximately 300,000 migrant workers on Thai soil. The problem could not be solved easily, despite repeated government attempts. So, the policy on migrant workers has kept the attention of the press until now.

d) Burmese internal politics. This is a regular item in the regional sections approximately 2-3 times a week in Thai language newspapers and 4-5 times in English ones.

3.4 Studies of Thai Media Representation

Chitraporn Vanaspong (1995) conducted research on ‘Racism in the presentation of Laos in Thai newspapers’. This is relevant research because it analyzes how minorities are represented. The presentation of Laos in Thai newspapers during the years 1985-1994 is studied by sampling 2 newspapers: *Thai Rath* and *Siam Rath*. Chitraporn investigated altogether 460 issues, 230 from each newspaper. She found that the content of the news depends on the state of Thai-Lao relations. The Thai press presents more negative views of Laos than positive ones. This indicates that Thais are sometimes nationalistic which leads to racism toward Laos. It was also suggested that media do not always reflect reality but rather act as “image builders”. This study does not actually use a human rights approach but explains the phenomenon of racism.

Ubonrat Siriyuvasak and Metta Vivattananukul (2000) studied the portrayal of children in Thai news. They investigated the portrayal of children in 2 major newspapers and two television channels and through selected news reporter interviews. The subjects of study are language, photos, reader’s attitudes, and types of news.

The research approach is based on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) together with particular reference to Article 10 of the (Thai) National Declaration on Children (NDC). They found that whereas Thailand has ratified the CRC and proclaimed the NDC, the specific child rights in NDC Article 10 are still violated. They recommend that the state should provide legal protection for child victims and regulate media reporting.

The study is an example of media research based on a human rights analysis. However the content analysis methodology of this study gives only a broad perspective of the problem while a textual analysis would be more suitable to look at more detail.



CHAPTER 4

NEWS REPORTING ON THE EMBASSY AND THE RATCHABURI HOSPITAL EVENT

This chapter is divided into 3 sections. The first section comprises a frequency and textual analysis of: newspaper items in the periods of one month before each the two events under investigation; this is to establish a rough baseline of the level Burmese news reporting and commentary in the press under normal circumstances. The second section contains a similar analysis of the one month periods after the start of the Embassy and the Ratchaburi Hospital events. In the third section, the events are analyzed in terms of the codes of ethics and media sociology as well as the opinion of key informants.

4.1 One month periods before the Embassy and the Ratchaburi Hospital events

The following table shows the frequency of news reporting and commentary on Burmese affairs on the one month periods before the Embassy event and the Ratchaburi Hospital events. The point examining one month before is to assess the general nature of how Burma and the Burmese are reported by the Thai media.

Table 4.1 Number of items classified by type and newspaper for the 2 one-month periods before the Embassy and Hospital events.

Newspaper	1 month before	News	Comment	Total
<i>Thai Rath</i>	Sept	16	0	16
	Dec	13	2	15
<i>Matichon</i>	Sept	11	0	11
	Dec	10	0	10
<i>The Nation</i>	Sept	20	6	26
	Dec	18	4	22

The levels of reporting on Burmese affairs in each of the one-month periods before the two events show remarkable similarity. It can therefore be assumed that this represents a kind of normal background level of interest in Burma.

It is perhaps worth noting that the two events occurred within 3 months of each other. The fact that the level of reporting before the second event is approximately the same as that before the first event indicates that interest after the Embassy event quickly subsided to the normal background level and there was no observable long-term effect in raising the level of interest.

4.1.1 News and Comments

News on Burmese issues from the three newspapers can be classified roughly as concerning the political situation inside Burma as one example of foreign news, the border situation, Burmese as perpetrators of crimes, Burmese as victims of crimes, and Burmese migrant workers.

Thai Rath news reports related to crime (15) are most frequent, those related to the political situation inside Burma are the second most frequent (7), and those related to the border situation are the third most frequent (6). The rest are related to migrant workers. Two comment pieces appear in the 'letters to the editor' and also address migrant workers. Many items related to crime involve Burmese migrant workers; 8 of the 15 news items reported Burmese as perpetrators of crimes and only 3 items

reported Burmese as victims of crimes. The crimes consist of gambling, logging, robbery, rape and murder.

Matichon presents a different view. Most news items on Burma in *Matichon* (9) address the political situation inside Burma. These concern the government and the possibility of a 9-9-99 uprising, the jailing of foreign activists and other military activities. Wire services are used as sources. The next most frequently reported issues are the situation along the border (5), and Burmese students in Thailand (3). There is also an item about the release of Thai prisoners and another on the case of a Thai policeman sacked for extorting money from Burmese workers. No pejorative wording is used in any news items. *Matichon* does not present much human interest news such as wrongdoing by or against Burmese.

The Nation does not report crime cases. Most news items are on the situation inside Burma (26). These are mostly about the arrest of foreign activists for political activities and the concerns about a 9-9-99 uprising. The rest are on the issues of drugs, ethnic rebellions and the border situation. Two items address rights issues: “*ILO blasts Burma over forced labour*”(8 Sept 1999: 8A) and “*Burma defends rights record*” (26 Sept 1999: 7A). There are 3 letters from readers. One is from a pseudonym, about politics in Burma. The other two are about the arrest of activists, one from the Australia Burma Council, an NGO supporting democracy in Burma, and the other from a Thai. Both support the actions of the arrested activists. All 3 letters are in favour of democracy in Burma. There is also one opinion piece written by Yindee Lertcharoenchok, a specialist reporter on Burmese issues. And there is a one-page feature about drugs and the Wa State Army.

There are news stories that all three newspapers cover, such as the concern about a 9-9-99 uprising, and also news stories that are reported in only one or two newspapers, such as the release of Thai prisoners in Burma. However the sources of news seem to differ according to the content. *Thai Rath* and *Matichon* normally do not refer to the source but *The Nation* does. Pichian Kurathong, a *Matichon* reporter, revealed in the interview that he uses wire services as well as stringers and local connections. There was no chance to interview *Thai Rath*, but the content of news items lead to the conclusion that the sources for *Thai Rath* news items are government agencies both in Thailand and Burmese. While *Thai Rath* presents mostly news related

to crimes, *Matichon* provides broader information; however *The Nation* reports show much broader scope. Burmese news items in *Thai Rath* and *Matichon* are mostly brief but *The Nation* presents longer and more complex reports. In addition, *The Nation* also reports news concerning rights issues, which are not present in the 2 Thai language newspapers.

The type of news reported in each newspaper also reflects the character of that newspaper. Among the three newspapers, *Thai Rath* reports crimes the most. This indicates that the interest of *Thai Rath* towards Burmese is more at the individual level than at a government or policy level. The major question that *Thai Rath* seems to be trying to answer is ‘what does Burmese as individuals do in Thai society?’ Because the majority of news items show Burmese as perpetrators of crimes the fairness of reporting becomes questionable.

The Burmese in *Thai Rath* reports are many times called ต่างด้าว *tang dao* (aliens) or คนงานต่างด้าว *khon ngan tang dao* (alien workers) for example: ทหารจับต่างด้าวพร้อมอาวุธ (The military seize aliens with weapons) (23 Sept 1999:10) จับต่างด้าวตัดไม้ (Aliens caught logging)(1 Sept 1999:12) จับต่างด้าวเล่นการพนัน (Aliens caught gambling) (1 Sept 1999: 12). These Thai words carry an overtone of racism or xenophobia, rather stronger than that of the English word ‘alien’. These words at the present time have become the formal words for illegal migrant workers who come mostly from poorer neighboring countries such as Burma, Cambodia or Lao. Westerners are not regularly referred to by these words but rather คนต่างชาติ *khon tang chad* (people from different country). *Khon tang chad* implies a higher degree of respect than *khon tang dao*.

However, it is interesting that *Thai Rath* changes from *tang dao* or *khon ngan tang dao* to พม่า *phama* (Burmese) in every news item in the month before the hospital event. This change may be related to an article carried by *The Nation* on 18 October 1999, which reported criticism by academics of previous Thai media coverage of Burmese affairs, including the Embassy event. Due to *Thai Rath*’s general policy does not permit reporters to give interview; it has not been possible to confirm the reason for this change in practice.

The Nation addresses issues concerning human rights more than the other two newspapers. There are possible reasons for this: the nature of the readership, a sense of media responsibility or editorial policy. Subhatra Bhumiprabhas from *The Nation* says “the way of writing and reporting also depends on the character of the readers. Before writing news the press will evaluate the target reader. The writing will conform to the level of knowledge of the readers. Readers of *The Nation* are mostly intellectual so you will see that crime news related to Burmese is normally not presented”.

The ‘Letters to the Editor’ column of each newspaper shows the interest and attitude of the readership as well as the editorial selection of letters. From this, it is clear that readers of *The Nation* have a more active interest in Burmese affairs. The letters show positive attitudes towards Burma, the Burmese and opposition groups.

4.2 One-month Periods after Embassy and the Ratchaburi Hospital Events

The examination of the media one month after is to determine how the events changed the media’s representation of issues relating to Burma.

4.2.1 News

The Embassy event – *Thai Rath* (26) *Matichon* (51) *The Nation* (71)

The Hospital event – *Thai Rath* (36) *Matichon* (60) *The Nation* (95)

Following contents show how the media reacted to two crisis events initiated by Burmese groups.

The Embassy

Table 4.2 Number of news items classified by type and newspaper in the period of one month after the start of the Embassy event

Newspaper	Front page	Following Page	Total
<i>Thai Rath</i>	22	4	26
<i>Matichon</i>	30	21	51
<i>The Nation</i>	27	44	71

Many incidents occurred as a result of the Embassy occupation. All 3 newspapers reported the same main incidents. The main one is the reaction of Burmese government and its impact on border trade. The peaceful solution to the occupation with no raiders arrested disappointed the Burmese military government. A couple of days after the event there are reports of anger in the Burmese government especially when Minister of the Interior General Sanan Kachornprasart called the occupiers “students fighting for democracy” (*The Nation* 3 October 1999). However the reaction of Burmese government was not consistent. A letter of thanks was sent to the Thai government but later Thai-Burma border points were closed by order of the Burmese government. Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai suggested “the Burmese are sending mixed signals”(The Nation 8 October 1999). These reactions created tension between the two governments. Thai fishing in Burmese waters was also prohibited soon after the event, causing big losses to Thai fishing fleet operators. The reporting of this news in *Thai Rath* and *Matichon* is quite different. *Thai Rath* tends to blame the weakness of the Thai government whereas *Matichon* was more sympathetic to the government.

A week before the end of the month the arrest of Thai gamblers in Burma was reported in all three newspapers. Actually the presence of Thai gamblers in Burma is normal and regularly condoned, but tension arising from the Embassy occupation led the Burmese government to act. The tension persisted even a month after the event.

On 19 October 1999 there were reports of Burmese students in Maneeloi camp locking UNHCR staff in a room at the camp because of the issue of monthly allowances. .

The weak response of the Thai government toward the Embassy occupation is mentioned in all three newspapers. There are some interviews or suggestions from the newspapers themselves and others warning that a weak response would invite future occupations.

It is seen that *Thai Rath* and *Matichon* followed General Sanan Kajornprasart, Minister of Interior, by changing their use of the word ‘terrorists’ to ‘Burmese students’. On the first day the occupiers are referred to as terrorists but after the second day when Gen. Sanan declared that they are students fighting for democracy *Thai Rath* changed likewise. In contrast, *The Nation* uses various nouns to refer to the occupiers

such as ‘Burmese students’, ‘raiders’, ‘terrorists’, ‘armed group’, ‘gunman’, ‘warriors’, ‘rebels’, ‘captors’, ‘attackers’ and ‘extremists’. This evidence shows the influence of the powerful figures on Thai language newspapers. The choice of language is determined by government actions, rather than by the events being described.

The content presented in *Thai Rath* is more critical of the Thai government as well as the government intelligence and security services rather than the occupiers directly. The Prime Minister and Minister of Interior are the main objects of criticism on the government side. The head of the National Security Council, Kajaphai Burusphad, is also blamed by *Thai Rath*. *Thai Rath* does not seem to favor the government of the time. Other news items in *Thai Rath* on political tension between Thailand and Burma also contain criticism of the Thai government.

All news items but one in *Matichon* addresses the Embassy event or issues directly related to it. *Matichon* reports the attitudes of reporters and readers both in support of and against the occupation. Similar to *Thai Rath*, there are news items on the reaction of the Burmese government, political tension, border tension, the Maneeloi student protest, arrest of gamblers, etc.

However, the information in the news items shows that *Matichon* seems to favor the government of the time more than *Thai Rath*. In addition, it also reports the strength of the government in dealing with the angry response of the Burmese government on the way the Thais resolved the Embassy event. *Thai Rath*'s front page headlines frequently refer to the Burmese (government) while *Matichon* refers to the Chuan government. For example the *Thai Rath* headline on 8 October reads “พม่าระบอบแค้น เผลดหัวเรือประมงไทย” (‘Burma takes revenge, repels Thai fishing boats’¹⁴) and on 12 October “พม่าถกโสร่ง ล่า 5 น.ศ.” (‘Burma lifts sarong¹⁵, hunts 5 students’), while *Matichon*'s headline on 9 October is “ชวนจุน ดีสองหน้า กรีดใส่พม่า ‘จวบวาบ’” (‘Chuan furious at two-faced Burma, flays ‘hot flashes’¹⁶) and on 17 October “ไม่เลิกปิดด่าน –

¹⁴ All quotations from Thai newspapers are translated by the author.

¹⁵ ‘Lift sarong’ is regarded as a way of expressing anger.

¹⁶ ‘Hot flashes’ (as in menopause) is a sign of unstable temper.

น่านน้ำ ฟ็องอาเซียน ไทยขีดเส้นตายพม่าแค่ พ.ย.” (‘Border closure to be reported at ASEAN, This give Burma Nov deadline.’)

This shows that newspapers tend to have their own agenda. As media sociology theory suggests, the agenda of the media can come from a variety of sources. Socialization of attitudes cause high levels of discrimination as evidenced by the *Thai Rath*'s reporting, while the influence of the Government can impact how the events are reported in *Matichon*.

Moreover, *Matichon* presented a lot of additional information about the Burmese and the event in run-ons from the front page. This further information is presented in a separate frame but the content is relevant to the headline news. Some examples are a transcript of the conversation of Johnny, a Burmese student occupier, with a radio announcer; an interview with Prasert Luang-aram-vej, a leading hostage who helped negotiations; the reaction of academics and the military; a public opinion poll on the exchange of MR Sukhumbhand Boribhada for the hostages and so on.

Similar to *Matichon*, *The Nation* has a lot of additional information presented in sidebars. A variety of sources was used by *The Nation* to explain the event in a broader perspective. Some sources mentioned are AFP, AP, local agencies and reporters who follow Burmese issues for a number of years.¹⁷

Following Pages

Two brief domestic news items in *Thai Rath* are about the arrest of Burmese and Karen for violating Thai laws and criticism of the Thai intelligence services.

Five domestic news items in *Matichon* vary in terms of content and length. Two items are about the arrests of Burmese selling amphetamines to students and of a Burmese gang producing fake passports. One item alerts business operators to register migrant workers. And the last is on the confusion in border trade policy.

The number of foreign news items decreases in both *Thai Rath* and *Matichon* from 7 to 1 and 8 to 3 respectively. This is probably because there is a lot of Burmese news after the Embassy event already. A foreign news item in *Thai Rath* is placed in

¹⁷ For example, Don Pathan and Yindee Lertcharoenchock .

the section ‘around the world’ and is about a demonstration by Burmese people in support of the Burmese government.

Three foreign news items in *Matichon* concern Burmese government adjustments to the kyat currency; the government’s rejection of the court case brought against it by Aung San Suu Kyi; and news about drug dealers. Some of this news is either translated or summarized from international sources.

The Hospital

The reporting on the Hospital event differs from the Embassy in that it is far more negative towards the Burmese occupiers. In the Embassy siege where the site is recognized as Burmese territory and many hostages are not Thai. The hospital siege, however, took place in a site which is considered to be a sanctuary. Places like hospitals, schools, and religious buildings are regarded as protected even in war time. Also, the hostages were Thais, including hospital patients. For these reasons, it is difficult for the occupiers to get sympathy from Thais as well as the media. However the final result of the deaths of the occupiers in what many people claim was an extra-judicial killing brought more than one reaction from the media.

Table 4.3 Number of new items classified by type and newspaper for the 2 one-month periods before the Embassy and Hospital events

Newspaper	Front page	Following Page	Total
<i>Thai Rath</i>	22	14	36
<i>Matichon</i>	18	42	60
<i>The Nation</i>	13	82	95

Front Page

Thai Rath reports generally support the operations of the Thai commando team. There are 22 front page items in 2 categories: headline news (17) and ‘scoops’

(5). Reports on this event start on 26 January 2000 and continue for another 10 days until 5 February.

In the first few days the reporting is emotional in style and becomes less so as time passes. *Thai Rath* uses sensational wordings such as กองกำลังเถื่อน (illegal¹⁸ troops) ถ้อย (scum) ผู้ก่อการร้าย (terrorists) ปฏิบัติการสุดกำแหงเหิมเกริม (most arrogant reckless action) กระหริ่งเหิม (reckless Karen) สุนัขจนตรอก (cornered dogs), etc.

It is possible that the negative reaction from the press is for general perpetrators not specifically Burmese. However there is evidence of an attempt to link the occupiers to historical events. The purpose seems to be to show the responsibility of the occupiers for unacceptable damage to Thailand on a scale equivalent to suppose past injustices.

เหตุการณ์ที่กำลังดำเนินอยู่นี้ สร้างความเจ็บแค้นให้แก่เลือดไทยทั้งหมด ไม่แพ้คราวที่ไทยเสีย กรุงศรีอยุธยา เมืองหลวงเก่าถึง 2 ครั้ง แก่พม่าเช่นกัน
(This unfolding event causes pain to all those of Thai blood. This is as bad as when the Thais twice lost the old capital of Ayutthaya to the Burmese) (*Thai Rath*, run-on from the front page headline news, 27 January 2000)

A feeling of satisfaction for the death of the occupiers is also expressed in the same news item.

ผลงานหยาบหั่นเมืองไทยของเหล่านักรบเดือนก้อดอาร์มีครั้งนี้ ได้รับการตอบแทนการกระทำอย่างสาสมใจแล้ว บัดนี้
(The insult to Thailand of these barbaric God's army warriors has now been paid back in full.)

Thai Rath tends to use sensational wordings in news items in a manner that amounts to discrimination. The Code of Ethics of the Press Council of Thailand, Item 15, states:

Newspapers must take into consideration the humanitarian principle and the dignity of an individual person when he or she is being presented in photo or mentioned in news story

Sensational wording raises the question of humanitarian principle. Words like ‘scum’, ‘reckless Karen’ and so on could be regarded as insulting to the dignity of the persons described. However, on the same day, one news item refers to allegations by international news agencies of possible extra-judicial killing as is known of the Thai police.

สำนักข่าวต่างประเทศลงข่าว ตั้งข้อสังเกตว่า ก่อนหน้านี้ เจ้าหน้าที่ไทยได้แถลงว่า กองโจร ก๊อดอาร์มีได้ถูกสังหารไป 9 คน และอีก 1 คน ยังหลบหนีอยู่ แต่ในเวลาต่อมากลับนำศพของ ทั้ง 10 คน ถูกห่อด้วยผ้าสีขาวมาเรียงโชว์หน้าโรงพยาบาล อย่างน้อย 6 ศพ มีเลือดไหลนองจาก ศีรษะด้วย สำนักข่าวรอยเตอร์ สังเกตว่า ในอดีตที่ผ่านมาเป็นที่รู้กันว่า บางครั้งตำรวจไทยมัก กระทำ “วิสามัญฆาตกรรม” พวกอาชญากรร้ายแรงอย่างรุนแรง หลังจับกุมได้หรืออาชญากร ขอมมอบตัวแล้ว

(Foreign news agencies earlier reported an announcement by the Thai authorities that 9 members of the God’s Army guerrillas were killed and another 1 went into hiding, but later 10 bodies wrapped in white cloth were laid out on show in front of the hospital. At least 6 bodies had blood flowing from the head. Reuters observed that in the past, the Thai police were known for ‘special executions’ of serious criminals after they had been captured or they had surrendered.)

This is an example of the Thai media commenting on a delicate issue by using the foreign press. The Thai media uses foreign reporting as the subject of the story, and not the event itself.

Matichon has 18 news items divided into headline news (13) and ‘scoops’ (5) with items appearing for 7 days continuously from 25-31 January. News presentation is straightforward. The opinion of various groups is presented, including government officials, soldiers, hostages, academics and also non-governmental activists.

¹⁸ The Thai word when applied to inanimate objects, e.g. factories, lotteries, means ‘illegal’. When applied to people, as here and elsewhere in examples in this study, the meaning can be either ‘illegal’ or ‘barbaric’.

Thirteen front page items appear in *The Nation* mostly during 25-31 January 2000. Expressions like ‘terrorist’ are used. Sources of news are in-house reporters and local agencies. The contents are diverse.

Following pages

Twelve local news items appear in *Thai Rath* under the topics of local crime, public health, and economics. None of them is positive towards Burmese. After the hospital event, Burmese as a whole seems to be blamed as burden to Thai society. Few days after the event, there is a public health news item concerns disease allegedly introduced by Burmese and the cost to Thailand of their medical treatment. The crime news is about Burmese committing rape, illegal entry, and fighting. Some items use expressions like กระหริ่งกามโรค (‘sex-mad Karen’) ทำคุณบูชาโทษ (‘ungrateful’) หนุ่มสาวต่างด้าว (‘alien youth’) and so on.

Twenty-seven items are found in *Matichon* with more than half of them related to the event. Some are from local stringers but without a by-line. The rest are about the arrest of an US activist, drugs, spying and ethnic groups.

Seventy four local news items are presented in *The Nation*. The contents are varied. More than 50 items appear within 7 days of the event. Most are reports by *The Nation* reporters themselves. Not only the details and comments of various groups of people are presented, the analysis and angles of rights and performance of media are also presented.

Foreign news

There are 2 brief foreign news items reported in *Thai Rath*, both about the political activities of the Burmese government. 3 foreign news items in *Matichon* concern God’s Army, US policy towards Burma and a Burmese spy working in both countries. *The Nation* has 8 foreign news items, most about UN actions towards Burma and the political situation inside the country.

Scoop

The Embassy event – *Thai Rath* (3) *Matichon* (6)

The Hospital event– *Thai Rath* (5) *Matichon* (5)

Thai Rath and *Matichon* both use the title ‘scoop’ for items that are in fact quite different in content between the 2 newspapers. Note that neither newspaper uses the word with its normal English-language meaning of news exclusive to that newspaper.

In *Matichon* ‘scoop’ is the title given to news items that accompany other stories on the same topic, often providing background information. As such, they do not differ significantly from other news items other than in the title.

In *Thai Rath* ‘scoop’ is used for items that resemble both news and comment. ‘Scoop’ items resemble comment items because they carry a title like other commentary columns in the newspaper. They also resemble news items because they occur on the front page (although one other column, ‘*Samnak khao hua khiaw*’, is also found on p1), they gave no name or pen name of the writer, and they contain information not found elsewhere

The Embassy

‘Scoop’ items in *Matichon* give further information or background on the issues, for example, an interview with a leading hostage, details of the Maneeloi Burmese student camp, an introduction to Hla Hmong, the Burmese Ambassador and background on Burmese student political groups along the border and in Thailand. There is also information on the Thai authorities’ action such as the government negotiations team and the Policy and Administrative Committee on Terrorism¹⁹. Further information about Ranong and fishing issues is also presented in the ‘scoop’ items.

Three ‘scoop’ items in *Thai Rath* also appear on the front page. Two of them are about the event and another one is about fishery concession. Although they are written as news items they also display a sympathetic attitude towards the Burmese students.

The Hospital

Thai Rath - Five front page ‘scoop’ items give background information on Karen rebel groups, God’s Army, the colonial background of Burma and comparing the Embassy event and the hospital event. The writing style is informal, more like story telling rather than news. Whereas it is not prominent that opinions are mixed in ‘scoop’, but the content present in the line that Thai Rath has its own addressing issue. Three out of five ‘scoop’ report in the way to support the buffer state policy²⁰.

The five ‘scoop’ items from *Matichon* give further information on God’s Army, the commando team, a review of TV media reporting style, and psychological symptoms of the hostages. The items contain not only reports but also analysis.

It is clearly seen that *Matichon* presents more variety of topic and contents than *Thai Rath*.

Sidebars

Matichon put more information relevant to the events in sidebars. On the 25th alone there are 6 sidebars and 3 each on the 26th and 27th. All give information related to the event: opinions of people on the internet, chronology of events, background to the hospital, the route that the raiders used, information on the dead men, interviews with various people such as a human rights activist, doctor, hostage, TV reporters allowed to shoot the story, and a speech of the government spokesman. *The Nation*’s coverage is similar to that of *Matichon* but with a greater number of side bars. However, *Thai Rath* has none. *Thai Rath* gives mostly contents of news itself not much on further information. It implies that a body of knowledge on the events and relevant issues has built more in *Matichon* and *The Nation*.

¹⁹ Title translated by author.

²⁰ Buffer state policy was a policy that Thai government informally assists Burmese ethnic minorities to fight with military government in order to prevent the possible armed conflict between Thai and

4.2.2 Comments

Table 4.4 Number of comment items on the Embassy event by month and category of item.

Newspaper	Leaders	Features	Columns	Guest Columns	Letters to the Editor	Total
Thai Rath	3	0	20	0	2	29
Matichon	4	0	19	1	4	28
The Nation	3	3	3	3	25	37

Table 4.5 Number of comment items on the Ratchaburi hospital event by month and category of item.

Newspaper	Leaders	Features	Columns	Guest Columns	Letters to the Editor	Total
Thai Rath	2	0	23	0	6	31
Matichon	6	1	19	5	0	31
The Nation	4	3	5	5	32	49

Before the two events, there was no commentary in the Thai newspapers and relatively little in *The Nation*. After the events, however, the proportion of comment items shifts considerably, outnumbering news items in *Thai Rath* and coming to about one half of the number of news items in *Matichon* and *The Nation*.

Leaders/editorials

The Embassy event – *Thai Rath* (3) *Matichon* (4) *The Nation* (3)

The Hospital event – *Thai Rath* (2) *Matichon* (6) *The Nation* (4)

Burmese. It seems nowadays that this policy is fading away since both governments are emphasizing on trading instead.

Leader/editorials show the standpoint of newspaper. The editorial team is normally drawn from a group of senior reporters. The team has the duty to plan assignments, choose the news, edit news reports, write comments of various formats, and so on. Leaders may not be written by only one editor.

The Embassy

During the Embassy event, there is not much difference in the number of leaders. All three newspapers express concerns that Burmese problems need to be solved. The background reasons for the Embassy event are explained in *Thai Rath*. *The Nation* does not address this issue as it has been covered in a number of news items before the Embassy event. The main content of the editorials is criticism of the performance of both the Thai and Burmese governments, especially the Thai national security agencies, and the policies of the Burmese government. The leaders mostly do not criticize the occupiers directly. However, *The Nation* criticizes the Thai government as being too sympathetic to the occupiers and warns that this kind of action will happen again, while leaders in the other two newspapers do not address this.

The Hospital

There are 2 leaders in *Thai Rath*. The first one on 26 January 2000 is to criticize the performance of the Thai authorities involved, especially the National Security Council. It also suggests reviewing the Thai-Burma relationship. The other leading item a day later appreciates the operation by the authorities, but the intelligence and national security services are again criticized.

Matichon has 6 leaders. Three of them run continuously from 26-28 January 2000. The first one criticizes the weakness of government, especially the national security agencies. The second is about international terrorism and how to handle it. On the third day the leader questions the operations of the commando team. The government is asked to explain to the public how the raiders died. A further 2 items presented a couple days later suggest that the operation was too tough and questioned the responsibility of government as well as the media.

Four items in *The Nation* address various issues from border politics to media critiques. Extra-judicial killings and proper media roles are addressed.

Burmese are not the major concern of *Thai Rath* leaders. Only the Thai side, especially government agencies, is of interest. Two leaders in *Thai Rath* on 26 and 27 January 2000 titled ‘ไทยถูกตบหน้าซ้ำซาก’ (Thais have been repeatedly slapped) ‘ต้องยกเครื่องครั้งใหญ่’ (it needs major changes) are criticizing and later appreciating work of Thai security agencies. *Matichon* readers on these same days present similar contents with *Thai Rath*. Later on 28 January 2000, the leader piece titled ‘ต้องทำให้โปร่งใส’ (there must be transparency), *Matichon* starts questioning the operation of Thai commando teams on the extra-judicial killing issue. As well as *Matichon*, *The Nation* has widened their issues on extra-judicial killing and responsibility of the media.

In terms of human rights concerns, it appears that *Matichon* and *The Nation* addressing rights while *Thai Rath* emphasizes only the performance of the Thai authorities.

Features

The Embassy event – *Thai Rath* (1) *Matichon* (0) *The Nation* (3)

The Hospital event – *Thai Rath* (0) *Matichon* (1) *The Nation* (3)

The Embassy

The one feature from *Thai Rath* does not address the event directly. Presented as a special weekend feature by their crime reporting team, it emphasizes the poor performance of the Thai intelligence services (*Thai Rath* 1999: 9). As Burmese news is regularly reported in the *Nation*, the number of features does not change much from before to after the event.

The Hospital

There are no features in *Thai Rath*. *Matichon* has one on the lives of the Suan Phueng refugees who are victims of fighting. *The Nation* has 3 features. One from Associated Press is about a significant local road for goods such as logs in Burma. Other reports are a trip to visit Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma by Subhatra

Bhumiprabhas, a Nation news reporter. And the last one by the same writer introduces the lives of Burmese migrant workers in Thailand through a Thai activist on Burmese issues. The angle of rights is featured in *Matichon* and *The Nation*. The rights of refugee and migrant worker issues are raised by these two newspapers.

Columns

The Embassy event – *Thai Rath* (20) *Matichon* (19) *The Nation* (3)

The Hospital event – *Thai Rath* (23) *Matichon* (19) *The Nation* (5)

The Embassy

After the Embassy event, the number of columns shows a big increase. *Thai Rath* and *Matichon* each increase to 20 and 19 respectively from zero a month before the event. *The Nation* has 1 before and 3 during and after the event. *The Nation* produces fewer columns on this issue than the Thai-language newspapers, partly because the newspaper devotes less space for columns in general.

There are 8 regular columns in *Thai Rath* (see Chapter 3). The number of Burmese items in each column ranges between 1-6. Most of these columnists are experienced reporters and are not necessary specialists on foreign issues. ‘*Poet fah song lok*’ is regarded as the only column devoted to foreign issues and is written by Nitiphom Navarat, who is known to have knowledge of international issues; he writes only one item regarding the Embassy event. ‘*Mangkong ha leb*’ has most in number (6) and the writing style is quite emotional and sarcastic when compared with the others. For example:

ปฏิบัติการอันสุนทรครั้งนี้ ทำให้ผมหวนนึกไปถึงสมัยดึกดำบรรพ์ ตะเบ็งชะเวตี, บุเรงนอง, อลองพญา ฯลฯ ว่าแต่ละท่านช่างเป็นนักรบที่ห้าวหาญ เป็นผู้ชนะสิบทิศ ... พอเห็นคุณจอห์นนี่ ผู้รู้กาลเทศะ ทำให้ผมได้รู้ว่า พวกท่านมิได้รบเก่งเท่าใดนักหรอก พวกข้าพเจ้าไม่ค่อยจะเอาไหนเอง

(This charming operation makes me think back to ancient times. Tabengchaweti, Burengnong, Alongphaya²¹ etc., each one a brave fighter, conquerors in ten quarters²²).

²¹ These are the names of 3 Burmese kings.

²² ‘Conquerors in Ten Quarters’ is the title of a well-known late 20th-century Thai novel by Yakob which praises the Burmese king Burengnong.

Looking at Mr Johnny Know-it-all makes me realize that their lot didn't fight well, but our side isn't very good.) (Mangkon ha leb 1999, 4 Oct: 3)

And following is another example from the same writer.

พม่าแต่งให้คนถือหนังสือเจรจาความเมืองถึง 6 ครั้ง 7 ครั้ง แล้ว ไม่มีความสัจจริงเที่ยงแท้ จึงแต่งคนให้ออกไปลาดตระเวนจับเอาผู้คนมา พม่าซึ่งไทยจับมาได้ให้การรับว่า ทูตซึ่งแต่งให้เข้ามาเจรจาความเมืองนั้น ไม่ได้ตั้งใจมาโดยสุจริตทั้งนั้น เพราะเหตุด้วยเมืองอังวะไม่ปรกติเหมือนแต่ก่อน กลัวไทยจะยกกองทัพไปตี จึงเกลี้ยกล่อมทำไมตรีไว้.....นี่แหละครับ สำเนาสาส์นที่กองทัพไทยสื่อสารถึงพม่า เมื่อปี 2356 หรือในสมัยรัชกาลที่ 2....

(Burma sent 6 or 7 envoys with diplomatic notes but all of them insincere. So Thailand sent sentries to seize Burmese. The Burmese who were seized confessed that the envoys had not come with good intentions because Angwa was not like before and feared an attack by the Thai army. So the Burmese envoys pretended to make friends ... This, sir, is what the Thai army communicated to Burma in 1813, or in the reign of Rama II ...')

(Mangkon ha leb 1999, 13 Oct: 3)

However this column also has content sympathetic to the Burmese, suggesting that a policy of the Burmese government to close off fisheries to the Thais would make trouble not only for Thais but also for Burmese workers.

พม่าเรียกเก็บค่าสัมปทานการจับปลาในน่านน้ำพม่า เอาเงินสดไปแล้ว วันดีคืนดีก็สั่งยกเลิกสัมปทานทั้งหมด ชาวพม่าซึ่งเป็นลูกเรือประมงในไทยหลายหมื่นคน ก็ตกงานเรียบ ไม่มีจะกิน คนเหล่านี้ มีครอบครัว มีลูกเมีย จำต้องทำงานทุกวัน ไม่มีงานทำก็ไม่จะมีจะกิน เงินสำรองที่มีก็อยู่ไปได้ไม่กี่วัน พม่าอด พม่าหิว พม่าไม่รู้จะหันหน้าไปพึ่งใคร พม่าก็จำต้องจี้ ต้องปล้น

(Burma has awarded fishery concessions in Burmese waters and taken the fees. One day they revoked all the concessions. There are tens of thousands of Burmese in Thai fishing crews who lost their jobs and were left to starve. They have families, children, wives. They need to work every day. If they have no work, they have nothing to eat. Any savings they have will soon run out. The Burmese will suffer, the Burmese will starve, the Burmese won't know who to turn to, the Burmese will have to become muggers and thieves. ...) (Mangkon ha leb 1999, 13 Oct: 3)

Columns in *Thai Rath* are in fact more critical of the Thai government rather than of the Burmese themselves.

For *Matichon*, Mong lok jak mum thai by Pichian Khurathong, who is a foreign news editor, has most items (7). Dern nah chon has 4 items written by different writers with different attitudes toward the event. Disapproval of the actions of the Burmese students is also expressed, however, in neutral language.

ขอมองเรื่องพม่าที่กำลังร้อน ผมว่าพวกนักศึกษาพม่าที่บุกยึดสถานทูตพม่ามานานหนึ่งวัน คงจะได้สิ่งที่พวกเขาต้องการในที่สุด คือได้รับความสนใจจากชาวโลก พวกเขาคงจะเกรงว่า โลกกำลังลืมพวกเขา กำลังลืมเรื่องของพม่า การต่อสู้และเรียกร้องประชาธิปไตย จากคณะรัฐบาลทหารที่ไม่ยอมคายอำนาจ...การที่พวกเขาบุกยึดสถานทูตพม่า จึงเป็นไปเพื่อให้โลกไม่ลืมปัญหาพม่า และการที่พวกเขาไม่ใช้ความรุนแรงและเรียกร้องในสิ่งที่ไม่แข็งกร้าวจนเกินไป ย่อมทำให้พวกเขาได้รับความเห็นอกเห็นใจมากกว่าการใช้ความรุนแรง

(I want to look at Burmese affairs that are in the news. I think that the Burmese students who attacked the Burmese Embassy a day ago have got what they wanted, which is the world's attention. They may be afraid that they world is forgetting them and forgetting the situation in Burma, the struggle for democracy from the military government that refuses to give up power....The attack on the Embassy was to remind the world of the problems in Burma. Their avoidance of violence and the reasonableness of their demands has gained them more sympathy than violence would have.) (Pichian 1999, 4 Oct: 2)

From examples, it can be seen that columnists in *Thai Rath* and *Matichon*, who address the issue of the events more than others, use different kind of language to express the event. *Mungkon ha leb* uses wordings that arise emotion of readers than *Pichian Kurathong*. Moreover, *Mungkon ha leb* tries to link the hospital event to historical event as in above example.

Three columns in *The Nation* are from Yindee Lertcharoenchok(1) and Kavi Chongkitthavorn (2). Yindee suggests that the decision to let the occupiers go was wrong. 'Heavily-armed Burmese radicals' is used to describe the occupiers. Kavi deals with political relations between Thai and Burma, one item being written in a sarcastic manner.

In terms of columns, it is seen that the event is mostly frequently presented in *Thai Rath* by ‘*Mangkorn ha leb*’, which normally addresses general social and political issues in Thailand rather than specializing on foreign affairs. The column ‘*Poet fah song lok*’, which focusses on foreign issues, has very little role in this case. In contrast, the most extensive coverage in *Matichon* is through ‘*Mong lok jak mum thai*’ a column devoted to foreign (including Burmese) issues. One column in the *The Nation* is written by a reporter, Yindee Lertcharoenchok, a reporter specializing in Burmese affairs for nearly a decade.

The opinions of the columnists commenting on the event are partly a reaction to the events themselves, rather than the nationality of those who perpetrated them. As such, these opinions would not be discriminatory. However attempts to link the perpetrators with the illegal or otherwise unacceptable activities of other Burmese in Thailand, or with the Thai interpretation of historical relations between Siam (ancient Thai name) and Burma (as in *Mungkorn ha leb* of 13 October 1999) can be seen as prejudicial and discriminatory.

The Hospital

The Hospital event has a more negative impact on Thais, and 23 columns in *Thai Rath* are sensational and judgmental, almost all supporting the commando operation. Some columns use very sensational wordings such as ‘ไอ้กองโจรกะเหรี่ยง (Karen bandits) ก๊อดแดมอาร์มี (God’s damn army²³) กะเหรี่ยงบ๊องส์ ๆ (crazy Karen) อหังการ (insolent) ลูกเสือ ลูกตะเข้ (tiger cubs, crocodile young²⁴) เนรคุณ (ungrateful) โหดเหี้ยม (brutal) ทารุณ (cruel) etc. Impolite pronouns are also used such as ‘กู (kuu, ‘I, me’) มีง (mueng ‘you’)²⁵’. Threats to the dignity of the country are addressed. Some columns recognize that extra-judicial killings took place but judge that the victims deserved to die.

²³ In the transliteration of ‘God’s army’ into Thai, the final ‘s’ of ‘God’s’ is omitted. So the addition of the English word ‘damn’ in the Thai produces the expression ‘God-damn’.

²⁴ The implication is one who does not know his/her parentage.

²⁵ Mary Haas ‘Thai-English Student’s Dictionary’ 1964 describes these pronouns as ‘rude’.

บังเอิญ ตอนนี้ มนุษยธรรมยังได้คู่กับวิสามันญ์ฆาตกรรม กระแสคนไทยสะใจ มิตรประเทศก็ไม่ดีเทียบ

(Regarding this event people generally are not against extrajudicial killing. The Thai people think it serves them right. Friendly countries have not expressed criticism) (Mangkon har leb 2000, 28 Jan: 3).

Taking life is also argued to be reasonable. The right to life of the occupiers was not considered.

“ความจริงเมืองไทยเมืองพุทธ...การเบียดเบียนชีวิตมนุษย์เป็นบาป แต่สำหรับโจรกะเหรี่ยงก็อดแถมอาร์มี ต้องยกเว้นเป็นกรณีพิเศษ...เพราะพฤติกรรมของไอ้พวกนี้มันเหี้ยมเกริม ทำทายนานาจรรัฐ จนเกินขอบเขต”

(‘In fact, Thailand is a Buddhist country. It is a sin to oppress the lives of humans. But for the God’s damn army Karen bandits, we have to make a special exception because the behaviour of this lot is reckless, challenging the state’s authority beyond the limit.’) (Sammak kao hua keaw 2000, 27 Jan: 1)

Sensational wordings that occur mostly in *Thai Rath* are probably for the reason to please readership. The hospital event made Thais angry so the way *Thai Rath* chooses to use emotional language is satisfied by many Thais. This content also seems to convince that Thai government is right to execute these people.

Whereas *Thai Rath* uses these kinds of language, there is also writings concern of the death. For example:

ความจริงแล้ว การปฏิบัติเฉียบขาดที่ดำเนินการไปนั้น แม้จะทำให้เหตุการณ์สงบ ตัวประกันไม่ได้รับอันตราย แต่ภาพที่ออกมา นั้นยังมีเงื่อนปมแห่งความสงสัย เพราะแต่ละศพของกองกำลังก๊อดอาร์มีดูเหมือนจะถูกยิงเจาะหัวทุกคน สภาพศพเปลือยกายเหลือกางเกงในเพียงตัวเดียวคล้ายกันหมด

(In fact, even though this resolute operation that has been carried out restored calm and saved the hostages, the pictures that have come out raise suspicions. Every corpse of the God’s Army group seems to have been shot in the head. All the corpses were stripped to their underwear) (Kla dai kla sia 2000, 31 Jan: 6)

Matichon has 19 columns. Some approve and some disapprove of the Thai commando operation. Extra-judicial killing is mentioned in a couple of columns. Some sensational wordings are used such as หมอง (‘maung’) อหังการ (‘insolent’) เกรงใจ (‘ungrateful’) กินบนเรือน ชีบนหลังคา (‘eat in the house, shit on the roof’²⁶) อายินบหาย (bloody shame) One sympathetic column refers to the occupiers as ไร้เดียงสาและจนตรอก (naïve and cornered) (Pichian 2000, 29 Jan: 18) One column notes that the police extort migrant workers. There are also columns that support the government operation but using more neutral language than *Thai Rath*.

แม้มีข้อสังเกตุการตาย แต่ก็ขอบคุณ... (‘Even though the deaths were noted, we’re thankful’) (Dern nah chon 2000, 2 Feb: 6)

...ในแง่ของกะเหรี่ยง การที่พวกเขาถูบคมอธิปไตยของไทยครั้งนี้ พวกเขาหมดสิ้นโอกาสที่จะได้รับความรู้สึกที่ดี และการเห็นอกเห็นใจจากคนไทย บัดนี้ พวกเขาเป็นผู้ก่อการร้ายที่เป็นภัยต่อคนไทยและประเทศไทย มากกว่าที่จะเป็นมิตร หรือผู้ที่ต่อสู้เพื่อเอกราช ที่ควรได้รับความเห็นใจ

(‘On the Karens’ part, because they insulted Thai sovereignty this time, they lost the opportunity to get understanding and sympathy from the Thais. Now they are terrorists, a danger to Thais and Thailand, rather than friends or freedom fighters who deserve sympathy’) (Pichian 2000, 25 Jan: 18)

Five columns from *The Nation* give the perspective of various writers. Three items are written by members of the editorial team, two from Kavi Chongkittavorn and one from Suthichai Yoon. Kavi addresses the issue of the media guidelines proposed by the government and the suggestion to nurture Burmese in exile. Suthichai warns that the death of the occupiers, which upset ethnic opposition groups, may lead to future disasters. One item from a Burmese specialist reporter, Yindee Lertcharoenchok, predicts that Thailand may take a harsher role on Burmese issues after the crisis. Another item by political desk blames the failure of security officials that led to the Ratchaburi Hospital event.

²⁶ This refers to the supposed behaviour of cats and is regarded as the height of ingratitude.

Guest-columns

The Embassy – *Thai Rath* (0) *Matichon* (1) *The Nation* (3)

The hospital – *Thai Rath* (0) *Matichon* (5) *The Nation* (5)

The Embassy

Thai Rath has no guest columns. One guest article in *Matichon* is from a reader while all three guest-columns in *The Nation* are from international press agencies, Inter Press Service, the Straits Times and Deutsche Presse-Agentur. The contents from international press review negotiations with the Burmese military government and the “Stockholm syndrome” reaction of the hostages toward the occupiers.

The Hospital

There are no guest columns in *Thai Rath*. *Matichon* has five. Three of them are sympathetic towards the occupiers. Another one criticizes the work of the TV media by saying that money is influencing a lot of media work. *The Nation* also has five items. All of them are from international sources. The issues concern Karen rebellions, the future relationship between Thai and Burmese ethnic groups along the border and Thailand security’s poor performance.

Thai Rath provides no space for guest columns. Guest writing in the other two newspapers do not address the issue of rights but display a rather sympathetic reaction towards the occupiers especially, in the Hospital event. However, the media performance is mentioned in *Matichon*.

Letters to Editor

The Embassy – *Thai Rath* (2) *Matichon* (4) *The Nation* (25)

The hospital – *Thai Rath* (6) *Matichon* (0) *The Nation* (32)

The Embassy

Letters to editor can indicate the level of human rights concern of the newspaper through the process of selecting which letters are published.

The Nation publishes letters to editor every day and *Thai Rath* on Monday to Friday. *Matichon* publishes letters only on occasion.

After the Embassy event, two letters in *Thai Rath* presented negative views towards the Thai government and the occupiers. These angry letters use expressions such as ‘those aliens’ and claim that Thais have lost their dignity. In contrast, letters to *Matichon* show more varied attitudes. One letter criticizes the performance of the National Security Council and another addresses the corruption of Thai authorities who take bribes in exchange for issuing identity cards. One letter sympathizes with the occupation and disagrees with one Minister, saying “[the occupiers] should have not done on Thai soil whatever they liked to do, but somewhere else. It is not our matter” (“Letters” 1999, 27 Oct: 5) Letters to *The Nation* are much more numerous and varied in their content and the nationality of the writers. There are letters both in support of and against the occupation. The writers include Thais, Americans, Burmese, and Karen both as individuals and organizations. There are also letters from non-governmental organizations addressing Burmese issues and from groups of students in exile themselves. The content covers not only the Embassy event but also other relevant issues ranging from a discussion on refugee status and conditions to criticizing ASEAN’s role towards Burma. Examples of the varying content are a letter from a Karen group in exile on non-violent actions (Letters 1999, 13 Oct: 4) and an apology from student groups in exile to Thai society for the trouble of Burmese students in Maneeloi camp (“Letters” 1999, 27 Oct) Overall, the letters in *The Nation* reflect a wider participation of civil groups.

The way the letters are selected reflects the level of fairness of each newspaper. It is not known how many letters are sent to a newspaper. The selection for publication of a letter is by the newspaper’s editorial staff. This may be done merely to avoid repetition and hence the opinions of published letters may still reflect those of the newspaper’s readership. However, the selection may favor certain viewpoints, in accordance with a variety of factors such as editorial, or newspaper policy

The Hospital

Six letters from *Thai Rath* support the operation of the Thai authorities. Ood Turbo, a reporter who responds to this column, has shown personal opinion in the column as an example:

ศักดิ์ศรีของชีวิตทรัพย์สินของคนไทยที่ต่ำด้อยจมดินไปทุกวัน อย่างล่าสุดกรณีที่มีกองกำลังกะเหรี่ยงมายึด รพ.ราชบุรี แสดงให้เห็นถึงความห่วยแตกของงานข่าวกรองและ การปฏิบัติงานของทหาร ตำรวจ

(The dignity of Thai lives and property are buried every day. In the latest case, the occupation of Ratchaburi Hospital by the Karen God's Army showed the deficiencies of the intelligence-gathering and operations of the military and police.) (Ood 2000, 27 Jan)

Ood Turbo does not criticize the Burmese but the Thai authorities and links the Thais' loss of dignity because of the failings of the responsible Thai agencies. However readers do not distinguish the occupiers from Burmese workers.

ที่เกิดเรื่องเช่นนี้ได้เพราะเจ้าหน้าที่ไม่จริงจัง เช่นเดียวกับเรื่องแรงงานพม่ากับการเข้าเมือง บางกรณีเจ้าหน้าที่รู้เห็นเป็นใจ.....ควรจะต้องตั้งหน่วยงานพิเศษขึ้นมาปราบแรงงานเถื่อน

(This kind of thing happens because of the dishonesty of officials. It's the same with Burmese migrant workers. In some cases the officials in the know connive in this. ... A special agency should be set up to suppress illegal labour) (Ood 2000, 5 Feb: 6).

Matichon does not publish letters. A large number (32) of letters to *The Nation* covers diverse opinions, suggestions and criticisms. The writers are also diverse, ranging from the general public to famous figures, i.e. Thai government officials, academics, activists, Burmese in exile, etc. Some are formal responses from officials. There are also regular contributors who often send letters.

4.3 Codes of Ethics and Human Rights and Media Sociology

A. Awareness of Code of Ethics

The representation of news and comment on studied issues has raised questioning on the respect of some codes of ethics. They are item 6, item 8, item 9,

item 15, item 26 in section II of the Press Council of Thailand and item 5 in the Reporters Association of Thailand.

Press Council of Thailand:

Item 6 Newspapers must be fair to all parties mentioned in the news stories.

Item 8 A newspapers must be neutral in its presentation with the understanding that bias reporting could results in a legal action taken against the party/parties mentioned in the article.

Item 9 Newspapers must refrain from putting the opinion of the individual reporters in the news article.

Item 15 Newspapers must take into consideration the humanitarian principle and the dignity of an individual person when he or she is being presented in photo or mentioned in news story.

Item 26 Newspapers must not have a hidden motive when expressing opinion or news analysis.

And

Reporters Association of Thailand: Item 5 to be free from the influence of any individuals or interest group.

Key informants interviews from *Matichon* and *The Nation* admit that most reporters are not aware of the code of ethics. Many of them do not even know there is a code of ethics. They report that only reporters who have studied journalism in an academic institution would be familiar with an ethical approach. When workshops on this issue are held from time to time, reporters still have no interest in attending.

When questioned about a code of ethics, most informants appeared to interpret this more as best practice. Where ethical questions are considered, they are not much different from those governing other businesses, such as conflict of interest. In other words, press people do not seem to have any better understanding of the special ethics applying to media than the general public.

When responding to questions about codes of ethics, the interviewed reporters responded with the concepts; a) impartiality and giving all sides an opportunity to be

heard, b) checking and balancing system or cross check, c) care in wording and d) no writing in order to gain personal benefit.

The a) impartiality and giving all sides an opportunity to be heard is similar to item 6 of the Code of Ethics used in this study. The b) checking and balancing system is similar to item 9, but is framed more as a best practice. The c) care in wording is similar to item 15, but only in part. The d) no writing in order to gain personal benefit is similar to general ethical principles governing many kinds of business.

Reporters absorb these ethics from socialization rather than formal education or orientation. Key informants from *Matichon* say that there is an orientation for new reporters and they believe an introduction to media ethics would be part of the orientation. *The Nation* key informants say an awareness of these ethics is passed from generation to generation like juniors learn from seniors.

Since there is no formal procedure to educate reporters in media ethics, respect for the code of ethics is very much individualistic. We could not assume that all reporters acknowledge and implement them at the same level.

In addition to the lack of formalized introduction to the code of ethics, the informants do not report any procedure for ensuring compliance. It seems that the code of ethics is not an important aspect of reporting in Thailand. Individual reporters may follow certain aspects of the code, but this seems to be a result of their own morals than any institutional structure.

In short, codes of ethics are not a main priority for the press reporters. The explanation of this phenomenon can be explained through a media sociology approach.

B. Media sociology

As mentioned in chapter 2, the media sociology approach believes that factors such as organizational routines, social institutions, ideology of those in power in society, and so on. influence media performance so that it does not accurately reflect events in a factual way.

The various factors are as follows:

1. Content is influenced by media workers' socialization and attitudes

From the interviews, reporters see that the general prejudice of Thai society against the Burmese is reflected in media representations more or less. As Thai reporters are a product of same socialization as other Thais, it is not surprising that they share similar attitudes towards the Burmese. This attitude is normally shown in comment items. Since columns represent opinions and are the responsibility of the author then any idea that is not prohibited, such as criticism of the monarchy, is allowed for publication.

However some key informants suggest that reporters who have experience in and an understanding of Burmese issues tend to have better attitudes towards Burmese. Pirat Pongpanit from *Matichon* says:

I know I am sympathetic towards the Burmese. I was one of the first groups of reporters that was allowed by the Burmese military to visit Burma a couple years after the 1988 uprising. I saw what really happened there. The Burmese military tried to hide it but there were still some clues...I see fear in people's eyes when asked why they don't want to go back home.

Direct experience and continuous work on the issues help reporters have better knowledge and understanding. When a reporter knows more, then the ability to explain the facts improves. However there are only a few reporters who specialize on Burmese issues.

Pichian Khurathong suggests that the reporting of events like the embassy and the hospital occupations should be as diverse as possible. The views from as many concerned persons as possible, such as hostages, government officers directly involved, etc. should be reported and the readers are allowed to make their own decision. However, the study found that *Thai Rath* does not present as broad a range of opinions as *Matichon* and *The Nation*. The data shows that they do not do much investigation, for example by checking news from other sources, or interviewing various groups of people, etc. It then appears that their columnists take a big role in educating readers on Burmese issues. Attitudes seem to play a more important role than facts.

2. Content is influenced by media routines

Reporters of *Matichon* and *The Nation* admit that each newspaper has its own culture which reflects the way of thinking of reporters. *Matichon* and *The Nation* claim to have liberal and democratic procedures. The study does not examine media routines and therefore gives no direct indication that the content of the embassy and the hospital events is influenced by media routines. However the study found that columns in *Thai Rath* tend to present a similar attitude which is critical of the government, quite positive towards the occupation of the embassy and completely negative towards the occupation of the hospital. Columns in *Matichon* and *The Nation*, however, present more varied views. Since *Thai Rath* columnists are expected to produce comment pieces on a daily basis, allowing little time for review and analysis of an issue, it could be that an institutional opinion on certain issue is decided and then followed automatically.

The crime desk is responsible for many stories in *Thai Rath*, including stories which are not directly crime stories, such as some of the reports on the Embassy event. This may be one reason why crime stories are very common among Burmese news items in *Thai Rath*.

3. Content is influenced by other social institutions and forces

Don Pathan of *The Nation* says that the market is one of the main determining factors of each newspaper. According to this view, each newspaper would identify a target readership and, in order to increase subscription and advertising income, try to maximize its circulation. This may involve assessing the general opinions of the readership on major issues and then ensuring that the newspaper reflects these opinions, or at least does not contradict them. This would result in the content of a newspaper being rather similar all the time.

4. Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo

Government influence on the content of newspapers can be seen. This is noticeable in the case of the Embassy event when all the newspapers generally changed their wordings referring to the occupiers in line with stated government

opinion, that the occupiers were students pursuing a good cause rather than terrorists or raiders.

The fact that *The Nation* and *Matichon* publish columns and *The Nation* publish letters to the editor with different opinions, may be an indicator that social institutions are less influential than in the case of *Thai Rath*.

In the case of the hospital event, the evidence of extra judicial executions presented the press with a dilemma. To comply with the code of ethics, newspapers would have to report the allegations. However, the security forces made very strong denials and were clearly displeased that any evidence had appeared in public. Even to discuss the possibility that the occupiers had been killed after surrendering was therefore a challenge to the ideological position of the government. Most public opinion also seemed to be in favour of summary execution, so discussion would also possibly go against readers' own opinions.

On this issue it seems that *Thai Rath* is more influenced by ideological positions and maintaining the status quo than *Matichon* and *The Nation*.

C. Human rights violations

International human rights instruments are obligations of states parties and are not the direct responsibility of the media. However, the media have an important role in promoting these rights through their performance.

It is, first of all, necessary to make clear that the use of arms, forcible occupied, and the taking of hostages, for whatever reason, violate both domestic and international law and human rights. However this study deals with the performance of the press. Violations of human rights by other parties are therefore not under study.

ICCPR, Article 14.2

Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall have the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.

This article is relevant to the alleged extra-judicial killings in Ratchaburi hospital event. *Khao Sod*, the 4th biggest Thai language newspaper after *Thai Rath*, *Daily News* and *Kom Chat Luek*, published photographs of the dead occupiers. The

photographs were copied by many other newspapers on the following day. The photographs raise questions about the government statement that the occupiers were killed in hot pursuit. It was confirmed by some hostages that summary killings had taken place.

If the occupiers were killed after surrendering their arms and after the hospital was under the control of government forces, then the killings would be a violation of Article which is 14.2 of the ICCPR and the media, on discovery of credible evidence, would have a responsibility for reporting this.

The first role of the press in such a case is to report the facts as promptly and as accurately as possible. All three newspapers did this, with however different emphasis on the views of different parties, especially government sources. All newspapers quoted eye-witness accounts of the killings by hostages. However, *Thai Rath* gave more attention to government view.

The study found that the newspapers commented on this issue in different ways. All three newspapers reported first the comments of international news agencies. This indicates some concern by the newspapers about expressing their own opinions. Reporting the comments of others, especially foreigners, is not a direct challenge to the government's statements. *Matichon* and *The Nation* then started to question the government's actions in leaders and in-house columns. In contrast, *Thai Rath* did not question but tried to support the government's denials. Leaders of *Thai Rath* are example of this incident (see page 49 leaders from the hospital event). News items are either from government sources or people who support the killings and all commentary follows the same line. The expression 'extra-judicial killing' is not mentioned in *Thai Rath* but is mentioned in the other two newspapers. *Matichon* and *The Nation* report comments asking why the occupiers could not be captured and put on trial rather than being killed.

Don Pathan of *The Nation* said in the interview that "we believe it was extra-judicial killing and it was questioned in *The Nation* newspaper but how many people read our newspaper?"

However, questioning of extra-judicial killings and opinions toward killings are different. Newspapers that question the killings do not necessarily disapprove of them. Reporters/journalists are allowed to express their opinion through commentary.

Comments both supporting and opposing the killings are reported in *Matichon* and *The Nation*. Whereas there is no strong evidence to say that these two newspapers take this human right law into consideration, the awareness of state execution are mentioned. In contrast, *Thai Rath* does not much questioning the state execution through news and comment. Then it can be said that the ICCPR Article 14.2 is not considered by this newspaper.

ICCPR, Article 20.2

Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Article 4 (a)

[States Parties] Shall declare an offence punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin, and also the provision of any assistance to racist activities, including the financing thereof.

The study found that expressions of racial hatred toward Burmese occurred regularly in *Thai Rath* both in news and comment items. *Matichon* sometimes used negative wordings but these were much rarer and weaker than in *Thai Rath*. *The Nation* did not use any expressions of racial hatred.

The use of negative expressions that show racial prejudice is not the same as advocacy, which is mentioned in the human rights instruments. None of the newspapers openly advocate racial discrimination. However, mass media have a special role in communication in a society and the use of racially discriminative language by a newspaper can be regarded as a form of advocacy of racial discrimination, especially if such language is used regularly.

There is evidence that the news and comment items in *Thai Rath* relatively strengthening racial discrimination. Many commentators believe that Burmese in Thailand suffer many forms of violations of human rights. However, Burmese news

items in *Thai Rath* often portray the Burmese as the perpetrators rather than victims of wrongdoing and also sensational, pejorative, prejudiced, or insulting expressions are many times used to refer to Burmese.

D. Changes in attitudes towards Burmese

From interviews, all reporters agree that the attitude of Thais towards Burmese is not getting better. This applies not only to Burmese but other nationalities surrounding Thailand, particularly Lao and Cambodians. The Nation's Don Pathan says 'Thais are ethnocentric'. They feel people of neighboring countries are inferior. But it cannot be said that all Thais are prejudiced towards Burmese. The study shows letters to the editor from Thais who are also neutral or sympathetic to Burmese and choose to read and express their feelings to a like-minded newspaper (see p.57 letters to editor).

Thai reporters are also a product of Thai society. Two reporters from *The Nation* note that as Thai reporters are raised within Thai society with its prejudice towards Burmese, they may of course pass on this attitude through the press to varying degrees. It is difficult to be totally value-free even for media people. However Subhatra suggests that education and sufficient knowledge of the issues could help to nurture a more balanced attitude. The *Matichon* senior editor positively believes that the attitude of media people toward Burmese and Burma issues has changed for the better since the events.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

From the study of three newspapers, *Thai Rath*, *Matichon* and *The Nation*, conclusions can be drawn on the following 3 points.

A) Factors influencing news presentation

The three newspapers present different ways of reporting news and comments regarding Burmese affairs and the Embassy and the Ratchaburi events. The presentation of news is influenced by various factors. The main ones are government attitudes, the newspapers' own biases, targeted readership, and sources of information. These factors are significant in influencing the way of writing, the way of using sources of news and the way of selecting news.

Thai Rath presents Burmese news mostly as criminal and social issues in which Burmese are subjects of crimes. Sensational and pejorative words are regularly used in news and comments. *Thai Rath's* readership comprises mainstream less-educated Thais, who in general have a discriminatory attitude towards the Burmese; therefore, to reflect their readers' opinions, *Thai Rath* tends to use negative language when referring to the Burmese and to portray them in negative contexts (such as crime.) Government attitudes also influence *Thai Rath* reporting. Whereas news and comments in *Thai Rath* seem to not favor the government of the time, the reporting of the two hostage crises reveals a substantial government influence in that *Thai Rath* uses Thai and Burmese government sources, as well as its crime desk, more than international or wire service sources.

Matichon presents news and comments in an academic rather than sensational style. It does not emphasize criminal news. It presents informative content in 'scoop' columns and side bars. The language in *Matichon* is rarely sensational. This form of presentation, as with *Thai Rath*, corresponds to the targeted readership which is

relatively well educated, middle class, and socially active. The government's view also influences news and comments but less than with *Thai Rath*. *Matichon* chooses sources from local stringers, the Thai and Burmese governments, and wire services.

Similar to *Matichon*, *The Nation* gives informative and substantive content on the Burmese issues and the hostage crises. The scope of news and comments on Burmese issues is varied but mostly covers politics and Thai-Burma relations. Sources of news and comments are far more varied than both *Thai Rath* and *Matichon*. It is again to serve the readership which is well-educated, socially active, and business oriented, and able to read English well. However, number of readers of *The Nation* is much smaller than *Thai Rath* and *Matichon*.

B) Codes of ethics

Codes of ethics are not a main priority in the reporting of any of the three newspapers. However there are some ethical issues that reporters strongly respect. These are a) fairness to all parties, b) factual reporting, c) no attacks or intentionally false charges against anyone, d) no writing for rewards or personal benefit and e) careful use of language. However, these codes of ethics belong to individuals. Each reporter decides by her/himself whether or not, and to what extent they will respect them. In this matter we can conclude that those codes which are ignored are automatically violated. This study finds that some crucial codes of ethics are violated according to reporting on Burmese and the hostages' crises. They are item 6, item 8, item 9, item 15, item 26 in section II of the Press Council of Thailand and item 5 in the Reporters Association of Thailand.

C) Human rights laws

Human rights standards are not a main issue in news presentation. Since there is neither legal nor social obligation for newspapers to follow human rights standards, the level of observance is voluntary. *Thai Rath* shows no evidence of following these standards while *Matichon* deals with some rights issues especially in connection with the hospital crisis. In contrast, *The Nation* presents rights issues related to Burmese issues quite often both before and after the hostage crises. It again can be explained by reference to their readerships. The study found that the presentation of news and

comments in each studied newspaper respects the relevant human rights standards at different levels. It cannot be said that newspapers violate these articles since there is no legal binding for the media to follow human rights standards. However we can say whether and to what extent the presentation of news conforms to these human rights. The study found that:

For ICCPR Article 14.2, all three newspapers at first tended not to challenge the government directly on the case of the alleged extra-judicial killings of ten occupiers of the Ratchaburi hospital. This may be because of a lack of information until *Kao Sod* published the photos. Later they started questioning the government position by referring to international news agencies. As time passed, *Matichon* and *The Nation* addressed the issue of extra-judicial killings through their own leaders and comments. However this was not found in *Thai Rath*.

For ICCPR Article 20.2 and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Article 4 (a), the study finds that expressions of racial hatred toward Burmese, especially the occupiers of the hospital, occurred regularly in *Thai Rath* both in news and comment items. Use of negative language in *Matichon* is relatively uncommon and restricted to columns where it is the responsibility of the individual writer. There is no strong evidence of *The Nation* supporting racial hatred.

In comparing the three newspapers, *The Nation* provided a large amount of information on the two events from a variety of sources, but its readership is restricted. *Matichon* also provided informative news on these issues but again the readership of *Matichon* is limited to the urban middle class with a relatively high level of education. In contrast, *Thai Rath*, the newspaper with the highest circulation, which reaches all sectors and regions of Thai society, and hence perhaps the most influential newspaper in Thailand, repeatedly appears to strengthen negative attitudes by Thais toward Burmese.

From the study it is apparent that those responsible for newspaper reporting and comment in the three newspapers, and by implication the Thai press and media in general, do not as a whole take codes of ethics and human rights notions into consideration when presenting news and comment. They are aware of, and attempt to

follow, a smaller set of ethics, which also include best practice and ethics that would apply to general business activities.

5.2 Recommendations for the Thai media

1. Pre-service and regular in-service training on codes of ethics and human rights relevant to media profession should be provided.

2. Procedures should be developed and enforced to ensure that news and comments comply with codes of ethics and do not violate relevant human rights. These procedures should include a mechanism where members of the public can have claims of violations investigated and judged. The Burmese and other groups who have illegal or vulnerable status in Thailand, or difficulties in communicating because of language problems, should receive special assistance in accessing this mechanism. Special assistance of this kind can be found in human rights instruments such as Article 14.3(f) of ICCPR.

3. The reporters who pay attention on ethics and human rights should be honored and well recognized. They are less likely to violate codes of ethics of human rights in their reporting or comment. Those who care about details on reporting and try to investigate to get as adequate information as possible should be promoted as a role model. Therefore the creation of more ethical and human rights consciousness reporters will lead to a higher standard of professional reporting. This is especially important in the case of issues concerning neighboring countries where reporting that violates code of ethics or human rights may damage national relations. Examples are recent cases concerning Laos and Cambodia where inflammatory remarks reported in the media led to diplomatic problems, violence and damage to property.

4. The media have a responsibility to act as a watchdog on government operations, including possible violations of human rights. For this reason it is important that the press challenge the government interpretation of events when these do not appear to match the facts, as in the killings in the Ratchaburi hospital event, and actively seek information rather than rely on official press briefings or handouts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: Thai authors have been alphabetized by first name

- Alger, Dean E., "The Right to Privacy and Judicial Policymaking: Rethinking Conceptual Foundations," in *Media and Public Policy*, 101-119.
- Benjawan Uputchar, 2000, *The Portrayal of Ethnic Groups in Thai Society Through Daily Newspapers*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Journalism, Chulalongkorn University.
- Berger, Arthur Asa, 1991, *Media Research Techniques*, New York: Sage.
- Bhansoon Ladavalya, 1999, M.L. *Economic and Political Development Myanmar*, Research Series: Economic and Political Development in Southeast Asia, Bangkok: Kobfai.
- Broadmoor Tony, 2001, Labor Pains, *Irrawaddy*, Aug-Sep: 32-33
- "Burma defends rights record", 1999, *The Nation*, 26 Sept: 7A.
- Caliendo, Stephen M., at ed., All the News That's Fit to Print? New York Times Coverage of Human-Rights Violations, *The Harvard International Journal of Press Politics* 4.4 (1999) 48-69 [file://A:\4.caliendo\[1\].htm](file://A:\4.caliendo[1].htm)
- Charnvit Kasetsiri, 2001, *Burma: History and Politics*, Bangkok.
- , Kietchai Pongpanit, Theraphap Lohitkul, et al, 1998, *Tai Mong Phama* (Thais look at Burmese), Bangkok: Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma,
- Cheesman, Nick. 2002, *Legitimising the Union of Myanmar through primary school textbooks*. MEd disertation, University of Western Australia.
- Chitraporn Vanaspong, 1995, *Racism in The Presentation of Laos in Thai Newspapers*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Journalism, Chulalongkorn University.
- Chomsky, Noam, 1988, *The Culture of Terrorism*, Boston: South End Press.
- , 1993, *Necessary Illusions: Thought control in Democratic Societies*, London: Pluto Press.
- Darunee Paisanpanichkul, 2001. "Burmese Migrant Workers in Thailand: Policy and Protection," *Legal Issues on Burma Journal* 10:

- Dern nah chon, 2000, *Matichon*, 25 Jan: 6
- Don Pathan, 2002, "Border Blowout, *The Irrawaddy*, 10.4 May: 13-14
- Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 1999, *Human Rights, The Rule of Law, Democracy*, Germany: FNF 40 years Anniversary Conference.
- Gamble W., Michael and Terikwal Gamble, 1986, *Introducing Mass Communication*, New York: Mc Graw-Hill.
- Garry Mc, K J, ed., 1972, *Mass Communications: Selected Reading for Librarians*, Clive Bingley, London.
- Golding, Peter and Philip Elliott, 1979, "The Problem of Broadcast News," *Making the News*, New York, Longman, pp. 206-219.
- Hodgson, F.W., 1993, *Modern Newspaper Practice: A Primer on the Press*, Great Britain: Focal Press.
- "ILO blasts Burma over forced labour", 1999, *The Nation*, 8 Sept: 8A
- Judprakai Literature, 2004. *Krungthep Thurakit*, 22 Feb.
- Keeble, Richard., 2001. *The Newspapers Handbook*, London: Routledge,
- Kla dai kla sia, 2000, *Thai Rath*, 31 Jan: 6.
- Law Ian, 2002, *Race in the News*, Palgrave, New York,
- "Letters to Editor", 1999, *Matichon*, 27 Oct: 5.
- "Letters to Editor", 1999, *The Nation*, 13 Oct: 4.
- "Letters to Editor", 1999, *The Nation*, 27 Oct.
- Mangkong ha leb, 1999. "Johnny-know-it-all", *Thai Rath*, 4 Oct: 3.
- , 1999, "Prestige mutated", *Thai Rath*, 13 Oct: 3.
- , 2000, *Thai Rath*, 28 Jan: 3.
- McCargo, D., 2000, *Politics and the Press in Thailand: Media Machinations*, Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Monbiot, George, 2004, "A US Comedian brings us closer to the truth than the BBC. Most of Journalists fail us," *The Guardian*, 13 July.
- Natee Vichitsorasatra, 2002. Burma Hatred Raises Its Ugly Head Again, *The Nation*, 9 June: 5A.
- "No Kissing Cousins", 2003. *The Irrawaddy*, 11:10, December: 28.
- Nyo Nyo, 2001, Burmese Children in Thailand: Legal Aspects, *Legal Issues on Burma* 10: 51-56.

Ood Turbo, 2000, "Letters to Editor", *Thai Rath*, 27 Jan.

Ood Turbo, 2000, "Letters to Editor", *Thai Rath*, 5 Feb: 6.

Parker, Richard B., *A Definition of Privacy, Values in Conflict: Life, Liberty and the Rule of Law*: 227-296.

Pichian Kurathong, 1999, "Mong look jak mum thai", *Matichon*, 4 Oct: 2.

-----, 2000, "Mong look jak mum thai", *Matichon*, 25 Jan: 18

-----, 2000, "Mong look jak mum thai", *Matichon*, 29 Jan: 18.

Pornpimon Trichot, 1999, *The Burmese Government and the Ethnic Minority Groups*, Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund.

-----, 1999, "The way to Democracy in Burma: The obstacles still there", *Southeast Asia: Democratization and modern politics*, Ukrit Patamanand and Pornpimon Trichot, eds, Chulalongkorn University, 241-279.

Pornsuk Koetsawang, 1998, *The Migrant Workers from Burma in Thailand*, Social and population research center, Mahidol University.

Rungrawee Chalernsripinyorat, 2004, "Monumental Warfare," *The Irrawaddy*, 12.3 March: 30-31.

Sammak kao hua keaw, 2000, *Thai Rath*, 27 Jan: 1.

Sawaeng Jantrathip, 1999, *The News Borrowing from Foreign News Sources and Audiences' Perception of Their Credibility*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Journalism, Chulalongkorn University.

Schlesinger, Philip, 1990, "Rethinking the Sociology of Journalism: Source Strategies and the Limits of Media-Centrism" *Public Communication: The New Imperatives: Future Directions for Media Research*, Marjurie Ferguson, ed., London: Sage: 61-134.

Silverstein, Josef, 2000, "Burma and Thai relations", *Legal Issues on Burma Journal*, 6: 1-15

Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle, 2002, "The Global and the Local in International Communications," *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, Kelly Askew and Richard R-Wilk, eds., Cambridge: Blackwell: 337-356,

Steinberg, D I., 1990, "The Future of Burma: Crisis and Choice in Myanmar," Asian Agenda Report 14, *The Asia Society*, University Press of America,

- Teo, Peter. 2000. "Racism in the news: a critical discourse analysis of news reporting in two Australian newspapers", *Discourse and Society*, vol. 11, 1: 7-49.
- Thanong Khanthong. 2002, "Are we too far gone in our hatred of Burma?," *The Nation*, 9 June: 1-2.
- "The Burmese are sending mixed signals", 1999, *The Nation*, 8 October: 1.
- Ubonrat Siriyuwasak and Mettha Wiwattananukul, 2000, *Portrayal of Children in the News Thailand Country Report*, Bangkok: Asian Media Information and Communication Centre and UNICEF.
- Uncounted: political prisoners in Burma's ethnic areas*, 2003, Bangkok: Peace Way Foundation and Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma.
- Urai Singhpaiboonporn, 1999, *Content Analysis of News Reporting Related to Child Rights in Thai Newspapers along the Principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Public Relations, Chulalongkorn University.
- Watchareeporn Kulpisithicharoen, 1999, *The Content Analysis of AIDS in Thailand's Newspapers*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Public Relations, Chulalongkorn University.
- Zaw Aung, 2002, "Thaksin's Border Blues", *The Irrawaddy*, 10.4: 10-12
- , 2002, "Suspicious Neighbors: Neither Friend Nor Foe", *The Irrawaddy*, 10.4:18-19.

Interviews

- Don Pathan. 2004. May 8. Regional Desk Editor, *The Nation*.
- Pichian Kurathong. April 26. Executive Editor, *Matichon*.
- Pirat Pongpanit. 2004. May 11. Assistant News Editor, Head of Foreign News, Columnist, *Matichon*.
- Subhatra Bhumiprabhas. 2004, May 4. Reporter, *The Nation*.



CODE OF ETHICS: PRESS COUNCIL OF THAILAND

Code of Ethics for members of the Press Council of Thailand

The Press Council of Thailand, together with publishers, editors and reporters from the country's Independent media, deemed it necessary that the institution remain independent and self-regulated in line with democratic tradition and that a code of ethics be established to ensure professionalism, accountability, and responsibility. The Council supports freedom of expression and the idea that the public should be educated about the world in which they live through independent media. The Council holds the Institution of the Monarchy to be the highest social and political organ in the Kingdom. The following code of conducts was established by the executive board of the Press Council Thailand B.E. 2540 (1997)

Section I: General

Item 1: The following guidelines will from this point on be referred to as “the code of conduct for journalists, B.E. 2541 (1998)”

Item 2: That this code of conduct be put into effect on the day of the announcement.

Item 3: In this code of conduct, the word “news” refers to the printed text , headlines, photos and the caption that goes with the photos presented in the newspapers. “Newspaper” is defined by the Press Council of Thailand, B.E. 2540 (1997).

Section II: Code of Ethic and Guidelines for Newspapers

Item 4: Newspapers must hold the truth to be highest.

Item 5: Newspapers must present news taking into consideration the benefit of the public, not of an individual.

Item 6: Newspapers must be fair to all parties mentioned in the news stories.

Item 7: Newspapers must not make up false stories.

Item 8: A newspaper must be neutral in its presentation with the understanding that bias reporting could result in a legal action taken against the party/parties mentioned in the article.

Item 9: Newspapers must refrain from putting the opinion of the individual reporter in the news article.

Item 10: Newspapers must make references to the source regardless if the information is obtained from a printed text or an individual.

Item 11: When making references that could damage the reputation of an individual, newspapers must give that party the opportunity to state his case.

Item 12: In cases where an error has been committed, newspapers must issue a correction as soon as possible.

Item 13: Newspaper must not present news in such a way that the source of the stories could be revealed.

Item 14: Newspapers must ensure that confidentiality of the source and take into the consideration that the well being of the source could be at stake if the identity of that source is revealed.

Item 15: Newspapers must take into consideration the humanitarian principle and the dignity of an individual person when he or she is being presented in photo or mentioned in news story.

Item 16: Headlines must not be exaggerated to the point that they distort the truth, or the news story.

Item 17: Newspapers must use their judgement when presenting photographs that may be violent or phonographic in nature

Item 18: Newspapers must be just when making references to any party in its editorial or analysis.

Item 19: Advertisements in the newspaper must be presented as paid advertising and not as a news story.

Section III: Code of Ethics for Reporters

Item 20: Journalists must not violate the integrity of the institution of the independent media and the profession in which he or she works.

Item 21: Journalists must not abuse his/her position or make use of the profession in such ways that would result in obtaining favours.

Item 22: Journalists are prohibited from taking bribes or accepting valuable gifts or favours from sources because it could influence directly or indirectly the content of news reporting.

Section IV:

Item 23: Journalists must not accept any privilege or position that will influence their professional performance in disseminating correct and comprehensive information.

Item 24: When presenting a news report, newspapers must take into consideration the welfare and the benefit of the general public.

Item 25: Newspapers must obtain information in a dignified manners.

Item 26: Newspapers must not have a hidden motive when expressing opinion or news analysis.

Item 27: Newspapers must take into consideration that rights of an individual and balance it with the public's right to know.

Item 28: Newspapers must not allow paid advertisements to violate the established code of ethics of their industry and take into consideration the customs and values of the Kingdom.

Item 29: Newspapers must avoid paid advertisements that knowingly distribute false information to the public.

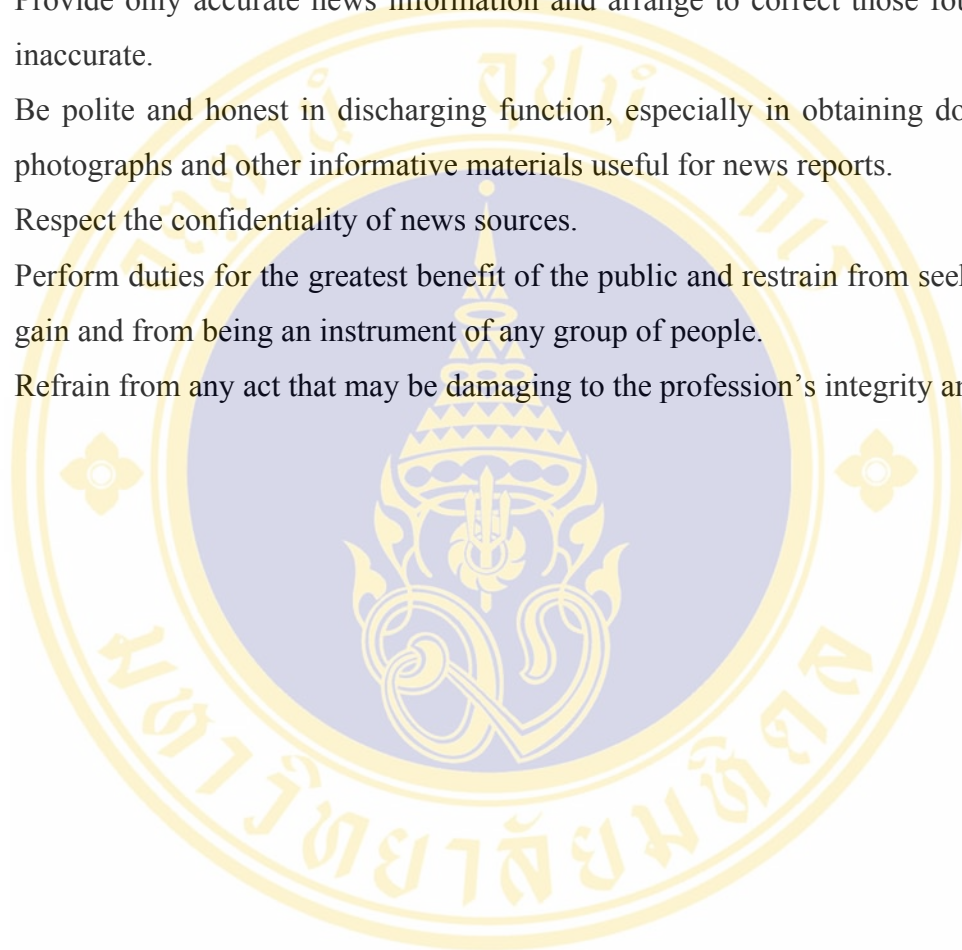
Item 30: Newspapers must not use profanity and avoid obscene gesture in their reporting.



CODES OF ETHICS: THAI JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION

Code of Conduct for Members of the Thai Journalists Association

1. Promote and maintain freedom of expression and news reporting.
2. Provide only accurate news information and arrange to correct those found to be inaccurate.
3. Be polite and honest in discharging function, especially in obtaining documents, photographs and other informative materials useful for news reports.
4. Respect the confidentiality of news sources.
5. Perform duties for the greatest benefit of the public and restrain from seeking self-gain and from being an instrument of any group of people.
6. Refrain from any act that may be damaging to the profession's integrity and image.





CODE OF ETHICS: REPORTERS ASSOCIATION OF THAILAND

To maintain the integrity of reporters and to emphasize the reporters' public responsibility, the Reporters' Association of Thailand stipulates the following code of ethics to be observed by members.

1. To promote and maintain the freedom of expression.
2. To inform the public of the truth. All published reports, if found distorted, must be immediately corrected.
3. To obtain the news, documents or photographs only through open and honest means.
4. To observe strict confidentiality of the source of information.
5. To be free from the influence of any individuals or interest groups.



CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

THE EMBASSY EVENT

1-2 October 1999

Source: The Nation

- 08:15 am: Armed attackers raise the flag symbolising the Burmese resistance movement in front of the main building at the embassy compound.
- 08:30 am: The hostage-takers release a 25-year-old Thai woman who is four months pregnant and who fell ill.
- 08:45 am: A Burmese Embassy staffer strolls out of the embassy main gate. He appears to be in serious pain, holding his chest as police escort him out of harm's way.
- 09:00 am: One attacker, armed with an AK-47 automatic rifle, peeps through the main gate, yelling of authorities to send food.
- 09:40 am: A police helicopter arrives at the scene, huddles over the embassy compound for about five minutes but is unable to land, forcing both the authorities and the hostage-takers to devise another plan. The latter had demanded a helicopter to take them and two hostages to the Thai-Burmese border.
- 10:30 am: The attackers release another woman and ask for more food.
- 11:00 am: Another police helicopter arrives at the scene but it, too, is unable to land at the embassy compound. Authorities and the hostage-takers agree that the Bangkok Christian School could be an alternative location.
- 12:20 pm: Police push onlookers and journalists away from the road to make way for the vans transporting the attackers and their hostages to Bangkok Christian School. Their action prompts photographers to close in on the compound to get a better look at the developments but are greeted with three rounds of shots fired into the air by the armed attackers.
- As people outside the embassy take cover, two vans carrying hostages and their captors drive out of the embassy compound towards the

school where a helicopter is waiting to take them to the border area. Unable to land, a third site has to be found immediately. It is the Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School.

12:50 pm: Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra and Chaiyapreuk Swangcharoen are swapped for the freedom of the hostages on the open field of the school.

13:10 pm: The helicopter carrying five armed attackers and two hostages fled to the Thai-Burmese border in Ratchaburi province.

13:45 pm: Helicopter pilots report back to the authorities in Bangkok about the accomplishment of the mission, and say they are returning to Bangkok with Sukhumbhand and Chiyapreuk. The armed group reportedly runs into the jungle on the Burmese side of the border, thus, ending a 25-hour ordeal. – The Nation October 3 1999

THE RATCHABURI HOSPITAL EVENT

24-25 January 2000

Source: Bangkok Post 26 January 2000

- 06:00 am: 10 heavily armed men dressed in green like soldiers, wearing hats and cover their faces hijacked a public bus no.18 from Suan Pheung district to Ratchaburi town.
- 07:30 am: They arrived at Ratchaburi hospital, took guards, patients, medical staff and other ordinary people at the hospital as hostages. These 200 hostages were kept at the Nursing Collage and Out Patient ward within the hospital.
- 9:00 pm-midnight Three hostages released by guerrillas.
- 1:30 am: Reporters were made to believe there would be an army briefing in a gymnasium. They were later locked up inside the gym as the authorities feared their work could alert the guerrillas to a rescue operation plan being hatched. The reporters broke out later to find barricades blocking access to the hospital premises had been moved further by another 100 m.
- 3: 00 am: Reporters were ordered to clear the hospital entrance. The barricades were moved back another 500 m amid rumours that a crack force was about to storm the hospital.
- 3:30 am: Lt-Gen Thaweeep Suwannasingha, the First Army commander, announced that Burmese government troops had seized the strong hold of God's Army guerrillas in Mae Pia Lek. However, the hostage-takers refused to surrender.
- 5:34 am: Explosions were heard from the hospital building followed by a series of gunshots. A pick-up truck carrying military reinforcements and two police patrol vehicles rushed to the hospital from their temporary command post at an adjacent sports centre. The hospital turned into a battlefield with deafening sounds of gunfire and exploding bombs.

- 5: 50 am: A helicopter circled over the hospital. On the ground, the din of gunfire continued to be heard as some of the guerrillas were flushed out and fired on.
- 6:18 am: The intensity of gunfire decreased.
- 6:25 am: Sporadic gunshots continued to be heard from different parts of the building. There were also sounds of glass breaking followed by grenade explosions and more gunshots.
- 6:37 am: Lt-Gen Thaweeep prepared to give a news conference.
- 6:46 am: Three more shots were heard while it was reported on police radio that six guerrillas were still loose inside the Sri Nakarin in-patients building.
- 6:58 am: A woman hostage was carried out of the hospital, visibly tired and shocked.
- 7:00 am: Another grenade exploded.
- 7:06 am: Three ambulances arrived.
- 7:30 am: Bomb disposal experts started searching the building.
- 7:40 am: Police and soldiers entered the hospital to gather evidence.
- 7:55 am: Two more ambulances and an emergency relief vehicle were sent to the hospital.
- 8:00 am: Ambulances left with a number of sick hostages.
- 8:34 am: A police helicopter flew United Nations officials who were briefed on the situation back to Bangkok
- 9:40 am: Thirty crack troops accomplished their mission and walked in two single files out of the hospital to rounds of applause from both officials and onlookers.
- 10:00 am: A fresh medical team and general staff workers relieved their colleagues who had been trapped inside the hospital.
- 11:30 am: The media were allowed inside the hospital.



APPENDIX E

KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWS

THE NATION

1. Subhatra Bhumiprabhas

She is a reporter and human rights specialist reported the Embassy event.

Reporting of the two events

As a human rights specialist, she took the responsibility to check news from human rights organizations, forensic offices, etc. She did not go to Ratchaburi but checked news in Bangkok from these sources.

She explained the difference in the media reporting of the Embassy and Ratchaburi events. The Embassy had the attention of all kinds of media. Radio played important role with negotiations taking place through Jor Sor 100¹. The event took place in Bangkok, which is the center of Thai media. The occupiers gained sympathy from the public because they are regarded as Burmese students fighting for democracy. Thais had heard about them and their political struggles but never communicated with them directly. The Embassy event was the first time for Thai public to communicate directly with Burmese students. It opened Burmese political dimensions to Thai society.

Also, the event happened in the Burmese Embassy so Thais did not think of it as a direct threat to Thai society. The media and public were able to follow the event minute by minute so they did not feel threatened.

In contrast, people felt that the Ratchaburi raiders were members of an army. The event took place in a hospital, which has two implications. It is recognized as a sanctuary during wartime and it belongs to the Thai government. The public also thought the second event happened because the first event was resolved too easily, which emboldened the occupiers for this event.

There was no direct communication as in the first event. The media were blocked from getting news. The media and hence the general public did not know

¹ Jor Sor 100 is a phone-in radio station normally reporting traffic conditions. Drivers (including taxis) are often tuned in to it.

what really happened until Khao Sod newspaper published pictures of the dead and some hostages started to reveal that some occupiers had surrendered.

The turning point was the publication of the pictures in Kao Sod. Both the media and the public started to question the reason for the deaths. The reports of some witnesses also changed the mood of the public and news presentation. The question arose among media people 'Did they deserve to die?' The thought of ingratitude still exists.

In The Nation newsroom there was an open debate among reporters with both sympathetic and unsympathetic views. Reporters were aware that news reports must be factual.

Thai attitudes towards Burmese

The Thai attitude toward the Burmese in general is prejudiced with a sense of nationalism as the main reason. They do not see people from neighboring countries as equals.

Attitude of reporters to Burmese

Each reporter has his/her own opinions. They choose by themselves whether to follow public opinion or not. However, media people are also Thais. So they share similar attitude as Thais in general. So attitudes towards the Burmese or the events can depend on the individual. In addition, it does not mean that reporters who have knowledge about the Burmese would always be sympathetic. Having information is a different matter from having an attitude.

Thai reporting on Burma

Knowledge of the issues is significant. Reporters who follow Burmese issues for some time would understand these people more. In general, Burmese news does not really receive the attention of reporters especially at Thai language newspapers. News on Burma mostly comes from the same source, which is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Burmese news is important only at the level of government to government. Burmese issues in Thailand are mostly presented by reporters on either the labor or crime beats. Only when reporters are personally interested in the issue do they try to follow or investigate the issues more.

The media has influence and also leads society. Media helps to find out the reasons. However it could not be said that public opinion is influenced only by the media. Readers have their own set of ideas. Some have already made up their minds about the event but some need more information before making any decision.

Nature of each newspaper also plays an important role. English language newspapers see the professionalism of reporters as important. Even senior reporters still go to the field and cover news. Thai language editors would send only junior reporters to the field and sit in the office rewriting.

The way of writing and reporting also depends on the character of the readers. Before writing news the press will evaluate the target reader. The writing will conform to the level of knowledge of the readers. Readers of The Nation are mostly intellectual so you will see that crime news related to Burmese is normally not presented.

The education of reporters is not encouraged either by the institution or the individual. Reporters who want to educate themselves may not get the support of their office. On the other hand, reporters themselves may not see any benefit in being educated on the issues they follow.

Comparing English and Thai local newspapers, the English ones are more open. They support further education that would be of professional benefit e.g. workshops on English or news writing skills improvement. They also develop specialist reporters. There are reporters who specialize in specific issues, who will be sent to cover news in their area of expertise.

The quality of news reporting very much depends on the sense of responsibility of media people. Some reporters are not interested in the issues. For example, reporters who are assigned to report the content of a seminar may instead of attending the entire seminar, attend only the launch. This kind of practice reflects the quality of the media organization.

The most important ethic for making good news is to cross check received information.

Codes of conduct

Regarding ethical issues, Subhatra is not sure whether reporters are aware of codes of conduct or even realize there are any. The most important thing for them is to

make news interesting. There is no procedure for following a code of conduct among reporters. They are not really interested in or aware of these matters. Even if there is a workshop provided by the reporters' association, reporters rarely attend. If reporters are interested in attending something like a human rights workshop, they may not be allowed leave from work.

Reporters respond to codes of ethics and human rights from time to time when those ethics are in question. So the sense of understanding of the media may be equal to that of people in general. There is not much hope of ethical conduct within the press. The recent cases of Matichon on the 28th floor case² and Krungthep Thurakit's digitally edited photo³ are some examples of failures of ethical conduct. Senior reporters are not good role models for the new generation.

Even if they are not aware of code of conduct that much reporters do take responsibility for impartiality. However, impartiality is debated among reporters and some believe that it may not be as important as equal opportunity for each party. One way to achieve that is to provide equal space for both sides.

The government did not interfere with the press. The radio and TV were interfered with. However, some of them belong to the government already.

Finally, Subhatra give a recommendation that news institutions, especially Thai language newspapers, should create more specialist reporters.

2. Don Pathan

He is a Regional Desk Editor and also following Burmese issues for many years.

Reporting of the 2 events

² This refers to an allegation in 2003 by a female Matichon reporter of an improper sexual approach in a hotel suite from a leading politician, Sanan Kachornprasart. The politician sued for libel. After initially standing by the reporter's allegations, Matichon editors in April 2004 made a public apology, and printed a retraction, although no fresh evidence was revealed. The politician withdrew the case.

³ On 28 April 2004, over 100 Thai Muslims were killed after attempting to attack a number of government posts in the south of Thailand. In a front-page photograph on 29 April, Krungthep Thurakit showed an ornamental sword in the hand of one of the dead attackers. Other newspapers showed the same body but with no sword. Krungthep Thurakit's sister newspaper is The Nation, which showed exactly the same picture, but with no sword. Krungthep Thurakit printed an apology on 30 April saying that the 'wrong' photograph, which they admit had been digitally altered, had been published because of 'production errors'.

Actually the first event was partly the cause of the Ratchaburi event. It was known among reporters that the first event upset the commander of the 1st Brigade of the Thai military. He wanted the students who fled to near God's Army to surrender but they did not. A couple days before the Ratchaburi event Thai troops were shelling God's Army and internally displaced Karen civilians. The Thai military and public believe that the end result, the deaths of the Karen occupiers, was acceptable. The end justifies the means.

Thai attitudes towards Burmese

Thais are ethnocentric towards people from neighboring countries. There are many reasons:

- The Thais feel that their economy is superior to theirs.
- Feelings of national superiority.
- Social stratification in Thailand allows Thais to look at nationals of neighbouring countries as occupying a place below the bottom rung on the Thai ladder.
- Top-down values allow the elite to impose their views easily
- A inferiority complex towards developed countries makes Thais want to have someone to look down on.

Attitudes of Thai reporters towards Burmese

Thai reporters are the product of Thai society so it's normal if they pass along their attitude through the press. News is driven from 2 forces, so Thai newspapers are market driven and issue driven, and the former has more influence. So newspapers are more likely to use content and language that will sell (and hence generate circulation figures that will be attractive to advertisers), than to take unpopular stances.

Codes of Conduct

Reporters are not aware of any code of conduct. They don't even know what a code of conduct is. The issue for them is how they decide what's news and what's not news. They pay attention to what will interest people. The Nation also thinks that way.

Reporters, even if they are not aware of any code of conduct, recognize some responsibility to the readers:

- try to be fair
- impartiality

As for the procedure to create awareness of the code of conduct, the culture of the Nation is that the junior learns from the senior. Training is weak. Senior reporters go to the field to collect information. (including the informant).

Human rights issues

Extra judicial killings. Of course the photos show the raiders were shot dead. The Nation raised this but ‘how many people read The Nation?’.

There are 2 ways of doing news: to look for news (by looking for stories) and to receive news (by relying on press releases and deliberate feeds). Thai reporters seem to receive news rather than look for news. Reporters have a herd instinct. This makes them feel comfortable.

Reporters and news on Burmese

English language newspapers need to show more responsibility than Thai newspapers since they have readers all over the world. This means they have to be more careful about the language they use. Thai language newspapers can use improper language [because the injured parties cannot read Thai].

The attitude of reporters towards Burmese issues has not much changed since the Ratchaburi event. It seems that they have a lot of information but they don't have knowledge. More information does not make people smarter. Information gives you more choice but the important thing is the analytical skill. Thais lack analytical skill. It is to do with the education system. In English culture we are taught to read and develop a context of understanding. I don't see much in the Thai educational system.

MATICHON**3. Pairat Pongpanit**

He is an assistant news editor, head of foreign news and columnist, has been working with Matichon for 20 years. He asked to not reveal the name of the column he writes. He is one of the first groups of international reporters that were allowed to go to Burma a couple years after the 1988 uprising.

Burmese news

Burmese news has a special character. There are 3 sources. The first is wire services such as AP, Reuter, etc. The second is from border area concerning ethnic minorities. The third is from Burmese activists in exile.

He also has to check news received from other sources such as embassies and government agencies. For Burmese news it is difficult to check the facts. So there is relatively little Burmese news. Nowadays there are websites of Burmese activists so the situation is better. The Burmese government newspaper New Light of Myanmar is also used as a source.

The embassy and the hospital events

The embassy event took place in Bangkok. Many Matichon reporters were sent not only to follow the situation but also to check the reaction of the parties involved. He was in the office checking international reaction via the wire services. The embassy event was observed by both local and international media. It was regarded as a case of Burmese students demanding democracy, which claimed international attention. The statement of the occupiers was also clear. There was little chance of violence. The occupiers just wanted to gain the world's attention again about the political struggle in Burma. Also the embassy event involved only a few Thai people, creating little worry among Thais in general.

The hospital has different elements even though they used the same methodology as at the embassy. Unlike the embassy, the hospital occupation was regarded as a local issue. It was not clear even for reporters what really happened at the hospital until the operation by Thai commando was over. Thais felt that this

situation had to be resolved as soon and as hard as possible. Some people were satisfied when the deaths were reported.

After seeing the photos he wrote a column questioning the deaths. Why nobody was left alive and why the shots were in the heads of the dead are the questions he raised. He agrees with the public that something had to be done but it does not always mean death.

Personal opinion towards the occupiers

He sees that these occupiers were not bad by nature but forced by circumstance. Thai officers did not try to negotiate with the hospital occupiers. If they had made a better effort the story might have not ended in tragedy. Another reason is that the low ability of the occupiers to communicate with the media.

Roles of reporters toward two events

He sees that for the hospital, reporters were able to do their job only after the end of the story.

Attitude of Thais toward Burmese

Pairat divided Thais into 2 geographical groups, the urban population and those along the border. Urban people do not care much about Burmese. They sympathize with Aung San Suu Kyi but not with Burmese in Thailand. As he used to live in Mae Sot, a border town in Tak province where a lot of Burmese cross the border for work, he feels that Thai people along the border seem to try to take advantage of the Burmese. The Burmese are regarded as inferior and foolish. Only few Thais have a positive view toward these people.

In general, Thais look at Burmese with prejudice. He feels that Thais tend not to understand other nationalities, not only Burmese but also Cambodians and Lao. It might be because of history textbooks.

His own attitude towards Burmese

As he was in the first group of reporters to go to Burma after the 1988 uprising, he feels sympathy with the Burmese. He said the opportunity to see Burma with his

eyes helped him understand the motives of the occupiers. He asked one Burmese in Thailand why he did not want to go back and he could not answer but shook with fear.

He points that as a reporter he has chance to receive more information. When a reporter knows more the ability to explain the facts is then improved. News on Burmese issues needs reporters who have knowledge of the issues, otherwise only superficial levels of information would come out. It must be understood that Burmese issues are complex involving various dimensions, race, economics, politics, etc.

Bias by reporters on Burmese issues

He notes that bias could happen intentionally or unintentionally and positively or negatively. He says only on behalf of himself that bias must not be an indicator of whether to write news or not. Facts are the most important thing. The duty of a reporter is to present facts and let readers judge by themselves.

Reporters and news on Burmese

There are only a few reporters in Thailand who really have knowledge on Burmese issues. For what they do not know, their reporting is influenced by 2 sources: international news agencies and government sources. As they rely on these sources, they do not question or challenge them.

He also expresses that a basic rule of news writing is to have a good check and balance system. Somehow it is difficult for a daily newspaper when deadlines prevent the chance to get various angles of information. This is unlike foreign reporters where they work by assignment with enough time to get information from various angles.

Awareness of Code of Ethics and procedures on implementation

As Pairat did not graduate from the field of mass communication, he does not know much about codes of ethics. However he addresses rules that he is strict on. These are:

- not to attack or make a false charge against anyone by intention
- report only the facts and
- provide equal opportunity

He learned these rules from senior reporters and also passes them onto junior ones. New reporters would get an orientation on strict principles of working, news writing techniques, and other issues related to work.

Level of understanding on Burmese issues after the events

He does not think that understanding of Burmese issues has been improved since then. The Thais still look at Burmese with the same attitude. Aung San Suu Kyi and the democracy movement are appreciated but Burmese in general are still seen as silly and troublemakers for Thais. When there is news saying that a Burmese worker has killed an employer, I understand. It is the outcome of this prejudice”

4. Pichian Kurathong

He is a former foreign news editor, now executive editor.

Burmese news

Foreign news in Matichon comes from 3 foreign agencies: Associated Press, AFP and Reuter. News of foreigners in Thailand is from Matichon reporters. For the Ratchaburi case both local and head office reporters and also stringers were used. News from other newspapers is also checked.

Columnists have freedom of expression. Matichon does not edit or ban what they write. They have their names on each column so they are responsible for that.

Columns from guest writers are checked first then published if it is alright. The main concern is that criticism of the monarchy is not allowed no matter how famous you are.

Attitude of Thais toward Burmese

He recognizes that there is prejudice reproduced through media such as textbooks.

Reporters and news on Burmese

Matichon reports Burmese news according to fact, not including a sense of historical events. For columns, Matichon does not censor their writing. Diversity of opinion has to be respected. However, it must not encourage any wrongdoing or

violence. In case some columnist is trying to do so the newspaper would give them warning by telling them that personal opinion is possible but they must be careful.

Awareness of Code of Ethics and procedures on implementation

Regarding ethics, Matichon has 3 main ones 1) no writing in order to gain rewards or personal benefit; 2) impartiality and 3) careful use of language. However, since it is a daily newspaper mistakes could happen. Sometimes improper wordings are used but we found them only after the newspaper is already in circulation. In this case we would talk to the reporter/rewriter to be more careful. The operation by the authorities toward the Ratchaburi occupation was likely to be too tough.

News reporting in this kind of situation should be as diverse as possible. The views should be reported from as many concerned persons as possible, i.e. hostages, government officers directly involved, etc. And the readers can make their own decision. In Matichon, he said they emphasize freedom of thought. The attitude of Thais toward Burmese does not influence reporting. For Burmese news they see the situation is the main factor, the facts that were really happening.

Matichon has training on codes of conduct for new reporters and I believe a code of conduct manual is provided. However, he is not sure since he does not take part in training himself.

He is not sure if the attitude of Thais in general has changed since the Ratchaburi event TV comedy programs still make fun of them for not being able to speak Thai properly such as asking Karen to sing the national anthem. He believes that prejudice toward neighboring countries still exists. Thais don't see people of neighboring countries as our equals.

Thai people should apply mettadham (humanitarian) principles in dealing with Burmese in Thailand). The government should accept that fact that the movement of labor is normal. The proper laws should be established and applied. Migrant workers should be trained in many skills i.e. the safe way to keep money, how to transfer money to Burma, etc.

Level of understanding on Burmese issues after the events

Matchon people have a better attitude toward Burmese since the Ratchaburi event. Their opinions are more liberal than conservative. They are not stuck with historical lessons. Humanitarianism is the basis of their ideas.

The important thing is that the movement for freedom must not use violence. It is difficult to win and instead increases the potential of a violent reaction from the government. Look at Gandhi as an example when thousands of people protested peacefully.

When asked for a definition of 'violence', he said that violence means carrying arms and taking the lives of people. The Ratchaburi case was the beginning of a form of violence. It would have been great solution if the raiders unarmed and surrender after let the world know what was happening to their group. They were really in a state of desperation.

BIOGRAPHY

NAME	Puttanee Kangkun
DATE OF BIRTH	13 August 1971
INSTITUTION ATTENDED	Chulalongkorn University, 1988-1991: Bachelor of Arts (Political Sciences) Thammasat University, 1993-1997: Master of Arts (Anthropology) Mahidol University, 1999-2004: Master of Arts (Human Rights)
HOME ADDRESS	33/92 Moo Ban Phassorn 1, Liabklong 3 Rd, Klong Sam, Klong Luang, Pathumthani, 12120 Tel. +66 02 901 1897 E-mail: puttanee@loxinfo.co.th