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Burma, Laos to open cross border checkpoint

Burma and Laos will be officially inaugurating their first border checkpoints tomorrow, according to a junta source in Kengtung.

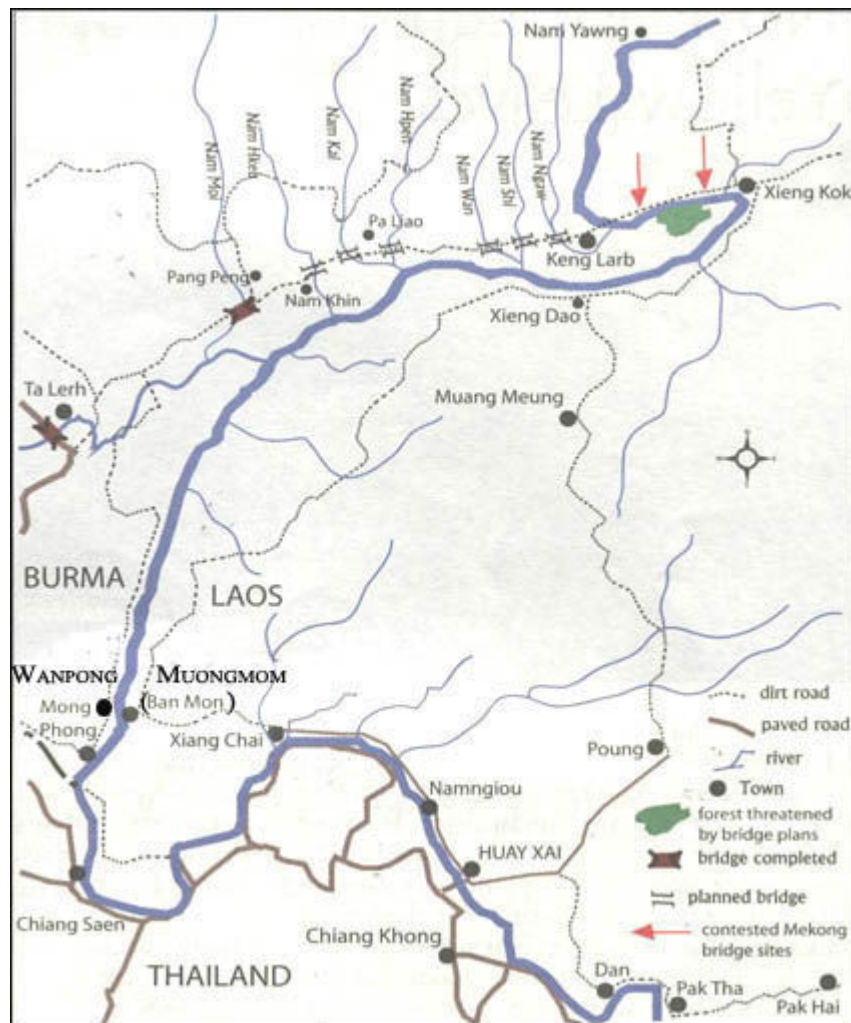
The two checkpoints: Wanpong (Banpong) on the Burmese side and Muongmom (Ban Mom) on the Laotian side, are located just north of the fabled Golden Triangle. Wanpong is 37 km east of Tachilek, right on the west bank of the Mekong.

"It'll be like traveling between Tachilek and Maesai," he said. "It will no longer be necessary to apply for passports and visas. A border pass will do instead."

One Tachilek resident said he had yet to learn about the planned opening. "However, if it's true, it will really be good, because like Maesai, we have a lot of relatives across the Mekong in Muongmom."

A Maesai resident meanwhile remarks there already exists a market at Muongmom where people from the three neighboring countries meet every ten days. "The only drawback is there is no bridge to connect the two sides, and we can only travel by boats," he said.

A bridge across the Mekong has been planned between Kenglarb, 100 km northeast of Tachilek and Laos's Xiengkong since 2004, according to the Lahu National Development Organization (LNDO). "But we have yet to see anything done except for confiscation of land near the planned site from the villagers," commented Japheth, the LNDO secretary.



Map: LNDO

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