

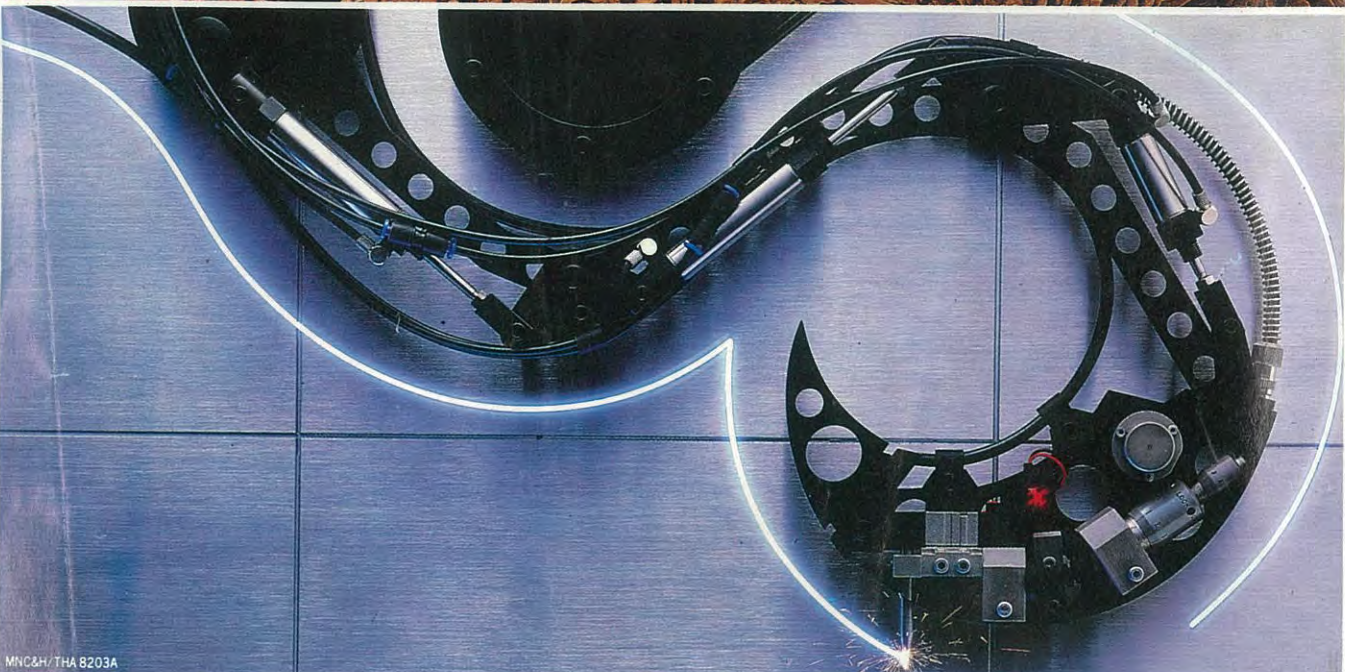
DATELINE: BANGKOK

THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS CLUB OF THAILAND MAGAZINE 2ND QUARTER 1991

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CLUB NEWS LETTER FROM THE BOARD

The FCCT has enjoyed an eventful year so far. The Golf Society has established itself with outings on Thursday mornings late each month. Past President Paul Wedel walked away from the first game with top honours, while lesser hacks competed to see who could lose the most golf balls. Regrettably, the club's incumbent President appears to hold that dubious honour, mislaying a remarkable eleven with only the feeble excuse that it was his first round in approximately twenty years.

Another success has been the launch of the Wine Society thanks to Associate Director for Membership, Yvan Van Outrive, and David Guy of Seagram. Each month, members have the opportunity to choose from six quality Seagram wines that can be delivered to their homes or offices at extremely competitive prices. The society, which is intended to be extremely informal, is being supported with special TGIF wine tasting sessions each month. According to David Guy, the response so far has been "not bad at all," and an FCCT pattern of preferences has already begun to emerge.

The Gulf War generated an extremely well attended programme in March. This featured an unusual compilation of CBS video takes set to music, plus Denis Gray of Associated Press, Derek Williams of CBS and David McKaige of Visnews recounting their experiences. Bob Nickelsberg of Time also chipped in from the floor. Sadly, Past President Yuli Ismartono, who actually witnessed the first wave of raids on Baghdad, was away on R&R in Manila at the time. The immediate downside of the war was the adverse effect it had on clubhouse attendances, when "credible threats" to places where foreigners

congregate possibly compounded the certain deathly boring threat of heavy traffic.

Two programmes had to be cancelled in January, and there was even concern at one point about whether the Fun Run in Lumpini Park should proceed. Over 250 runners made the event worthwhile, and generous sponsorship from numerous sources rewarded their exertions. Treasurer Peter Coeshott was the only Executive Committee member to complete the course — not coincidentally because he was the only one to start it.

The Inaugural Ball was also something of a triumph against the odds. Had it been held the Saturday before, it would have been completely lost in the excitement of the coup. Then, on the afternoon of the bash, there was another flurry of journalistic activity when part of Klong Toey erupted into a savage inferno spewing toxic fumes. The blaze was tamed by evening, so at least the charge that the foreign correspondents danced as Bangkok burned could not be levelled.

A highlight of the Ball was the appearance of a visiting Russian troupe that included a Rasputin look-alike who fuelled his formidable operatic gusto on neat vodka and club sandwiches. He was accompanied by what appeared to be two Siberian ice princesses, one of whom did an extremely proficient sideline in the lambada.

The Russians arrived courtesy of First Vice President Dr Boris Chekhonin, who has also been busy elevating the whole tone of weekly Executive Committee meetings. Boris recently celebrated his fifth anniversary in Bangkok, and showed up on the Tuesday with a tub of fine caviar and Russian champagne to toast the event. Here's looking at you, Boris. □

Of Koupreys and Waterfalls

FCCT member Jim Pringle, a former Reuters and Newsweek correspondent and now an Indochina freelancer, recently broke fresh ground in one of those Thai-Cambodian grey zones

Quit, while you're ahead, is a good motto in our business. That's what I'm always telling myself, but I rarely put the advice into practise. It is what I briefly thought after my colleague, Charles Antoine de Nerciat, Bangkok bureau chief of Agence France Presse, and myself, together with my wife Milly (who served as Cambodian language interpreter) had managed to talk our way into Preah Vihear. This is a once disputed Khmer temple on the Thai-Cambodian border, now held by soldiers of the Heng Samrin regime. Abandoned as it is, except for a small military detachment, it's hauntingly beautiful.

We already had a good story and pictures. A satisfactory day's work, so retire gracefully. But there were several hours of daylight left, and being the workaholic he is, Charlie suggested we try another road to the border to see if we could locate the Khmer Rouge. Two stories in one day? Unlikely, in this part of the world. I thought longingly of a cold Kloster. But the Petchkasem Hotel in Surin, though cheap and comfortable enough, is

damned noisy. It has live music to entertain what in Surin passes for the 'smart set' in the restaurant, coffee shop and bar — there's no escape.

And the north east countryside, uncommercial and untouristy, is so restful — ricefields, buffaloes, happy rural folk and stilted homes. Why waste the daylight? There was a waterfall in these parts, advertised on road signs as an attraction for visitors, so we could always say we were looking for that.

But our luck for that day had ran out. We soon fell foul of Task Force 303. "This area is dangerous," the overweight Thai army NCO told us at his camp on the edge of the escarpment in the Dangrek Mountains, and near a Khmer Rouge settlement. "I'm not scared," I replied mildly. He seemed to think it was a smart-ass answer, and we ended up repeating our story of the waterfall and how we had taken the wrong road to his officer. It didn't seem to occur to them to ask if we were journalists; we would have confessed. But they were top quality troops, doing their job, as we were trying to do ours. Passport

details were taken down and superiors consulted by radio; it looked as if we might be detained half the night. The live music at the Petchkasem suddenly didn't seem so bad after all. Then we were told we could go.

Next day, we were out at Otrao. We were waved through the check-point and dutifully reported to the Border Police camp detail. We were allowed to walk 50 yards to look at food distribution, and talk to some Cambodians recently arrived at the border. It was then that the vague reports of Ta Mok living in the area, possibly in the Thai town of Khu Khan, began to emerge. There was talk, also, of a big Khmer Rouge HQ in the Thai border village of Chai Pai.

I had always imagined that Ta Mok, commander of Khmer Rouge forces on the northern warfront, was based inside Cambodia, at Anlong Veng, leading his troops from the front. A cruel but legendary figure, he was supposedly limping on an artificial limb deep inside the country... How wrong can one be?

We arrived at the Chai Pai after a long drive over rough roads.



The author and his wife, Milly, stand amid the ruins of Phra Vihear temple, having chit-chatted their way past the guards. (Photo by Charles-Antoine de Nerciat)

This was a nature conservancy area, with a lake. There were a lot of check-points but the poles were all up, or were raised before explanations were needed. Without telling any fibs, we could say we were bird-watchers — I do enjoy looking at birds, including the feathered variety. (To get past check-points at the border it is useful to say you want to visit a wat. You are rarely refused, and you can salve your conscience by going to see a local wat before or after slipping across

the frontier). There were some military trucks around, but not much else so we headed south towards the Cambodian border.

But the road was impassible without a four-wheel drive vehicle so we returned to the village. The first building complex indicated an involvement in nature conservancy. It had a sign showing a kouprey, one of the world's largest mammals, and Cambodia's national animal — if it still exists there. (Despite Pol

Pot's alleged conversion to a green philosophy, Cambodians bang away at any bird or animal that moves — they need the food). I've always wanted to see a kouprey so asked where they were. "On the Cambodian side," the man said. By the way, were there any Cambodians around? "Well, you could try that building over there — the Cambodian arms depot," was the reply.

New shells and ammunition boxes littered the ground, and the

INSIGHT GUIDES

ARE GOING PLACES:

place was guarded by a Cambodian woman and baby; she spoke the stilted language of the Khmer Rouge. "This is for the people — for the people's battle to free Cambodia from the Vietnamese aggressors," she insisted. Quite so. Unobserved, I took a few pictures. We stopped for a refreshment in a local shop in the village. The people were Cambodian-speaking Thais. Ta Mok was quite frequently in the area, we learned. Were people afraid of him? "Why should they be, he never harmed anyone," was the reply. Hmm...not quite what one hears in Cambodia. We headed for Khu Khan.

It turned out that Ta Mok was a well-known figure in the town, whose people were also of Khmer descent. He went shopping downtown with his bodyguards. It's 19 miles from the Cambodian border. We soon learned the address of his local HQ. We drove to the high-walled compound and looked in at the gate, which was ajar. There were several crippled Khmer Rouge around, and a woman with a baby; the baby, we learned later, was 'Ta Mok's favourite grandchild.' We were invited in. Ta Mok or 'Lok Ta' (Mr. Grandfather) as he was known here had been there earlier in the day meeting with Thai traders.

A one-legged Khmer Rouge wearing a Chinese peaked cap and jacket strapped on an artificial limb and went off to find him. He came back saying he wasn't available but that Lok Nou would see us at 8 a.m. next morning. It was almost dark and time to go. The man left a little before us, a figure in a Khmer Rouge uniform cycling down a road well inside Thailand, and turned off on to a sideroad. That was where Ta Mok must live, while doing business at the HQ compound.

We arrived at 8.05 a.m. — it's a long drive from Surin — and Lok Nou was just leaving. He invited us in for a chat. Entering those Khmer

Rouge compounds is not like going in for a hamburger at McDonald's. All the stories one remembers of the Khmer Rouge come back, and the feeling is unsettling. And where was Task Force 838, the crack Thai unit that chaperones the coalition force chiefs along the border? They are a lot tougher than 303, who are quite tough enough for me, thanks.

Were we from UNBRO, Lok Nou wanted to know? No, we were journalists. (That reply might have surprised the suspicious characters at UNBRO who always seem to think correspondents are trying to pass themselves off as well-paid international civil servants). We wanted to meet Ta Mok, to interview him. Lok Nou said we were the first journalists to come calling in the five years they had been at Khu Khan (what have we all — including myself — been doing for the past few years?). He suggested we apply for an interview through the Democratic Kampuchea delegation at Escap. Politely, we exchanged farewells. He got into his black Toyota converted pickup with black army plates and followed us down the road into town.

Later, having lost our 'tail,' we returned, and checked out the side-road of the previous night. "Where are the Cambodians?" we asked a local Thai. She pointed to another high-walled compound nearby with red and white bougainvillea at the gate. There were two or three houses in the compound, and I did not doubt that Ta Mok was in one of them even at that moment. Several Cambodians, some in parts of Khmer Rouge uniforms were at the gate, around a military tanker truck. Later, we cruised back, and I loosed off a few snapshots.

There was still half a day left. What to do now? Maybe we had learned something. We were ahead. We quit, and hit the road back to Bangkok. □



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On the Wrong Side of Yet Another Coup

Thailand's last prime minister ended his administration under an olive-drab cloud that was all too familiar to him. Michael Shari, the editor of DATELINE: BANGKOK and Agence France-Presse reporter, dusts off a few old Chatichai tales on the occasion of the official reopening of coup season



Bangkok, Thailand (AP) — Ousted Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan talks with reporters, beside him on the right is interim Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun on March 9 at the Air Forces Security Command just before returning home after the military junta detained him for 14 days. Photog-Daeng.

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Some people have all the luck. When Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan was politely escorted to his seat on a London-bound airliner on March 12, it was not the first time that he was sent into a leisurely exile in the wake of a military coup.

His first exit followed the coup of September 17, 1957, when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat led the army in saving Thailand from corruption. Chatichai, then the youngest major-general in the Thai army, had resisted the takeover. The conspicuous wealth that he and his father, Field Marshal Pin Choonhavan, a former army chief, had amassed at the head of the Soi Ratchakru clan suited the cosmetic purposes of Sarit's anti-corruption campaign perfectly. Nevermind the financial empire that Sarit had built up, in the memory of one historian, in the State Lottery Bureau.

It was a poor way to repay young Chatichai, who had backed his father in leading a previous coup that had put a military faction

in power on November 8, 1947. That coup rings a bell. It was intended to "uphold the honor of the army which had been unjustly treated" and "improve the livelihood of the people."

"The coup will make it possible to clear up the assassination plot of the King," Professor Thak Chaloentiarana quotes the coup leaders as saying in his 1979 volume *Thailand: the Politics of Despotism Paternalism*.

Exit young Chatichai. He was condemned to a 15-year diplomatic career in Argentina, Austria and Switzerland. He reportedly reveled in his polo talents, acquired in the days when being a cavalry officer meant wearing spurs.

Local newspapers quickly learned how to present Chatichai after the 1988 general elections. They could not seem to squeeze in enough references to his disco-hopping nights out on the town with his wife, Thanphuying Boonruen. But the first couple also learned quickly. One of the first photo-

graphs Chatichai posed for after he secured the premiership was on his motorcycle. Thanphuying Boonruen asked a reporter standing next to me when she was getting into a limousine in front of Government House one day, "How do you like my hair? Does it match my dress today?"

At a party for local reporters at his Soi Ratchakru residence one night, I asked him why there were so many light switches in his living room. With a drink in his hand and a wry grin on his face, he walked over to the wall and threw a few switches at random. The room went dark and suddenly a globe on the ceiling began to rotate shining several colored beams of light. A strobe light began to flash, and Uncle Chat started to snap his fingers and dance to a tune on his quadraphonic sound system. He had succeeded in recreating the archetypical Bangkok disco in his

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ANNUAL FCCT AWARDS

*During this year's annual inaugural ball, our fearless president **Dominic Faulder** had the foresight to bestow the following awards on distinguished club members, as well as several who had distinguished themselves in ways they had not necessarily intended. Following are the coveted Special Awards and the dreaded Dubious Distinction Awards.*

SPECIAL AWARDS

DAVID AND GOY DYAR

The Voice of America's man in Bangkok astonished colleagues when he finally broke his vow of bachelorhood and married the stunning Goy. Their wedding reception in the FCCT Clubhouse brought an unprecedented avalanche of glamour and glitz, for Goy is a former Miss Thailand contender. It therefore came as a tremendous shock to read in Dateline that David had in fact been leading a double existence and was holding down, Thai style, a full-time second job in London as Reuter's chief political correspondent. The shockwaves abated when it became apparent that this was no more than another Terry McCarthy proofing error (and probably goes to show that one should never believe anything at all one reads in

the press). The other David, Reuter's David Storey, has of course happily progressed from Bangkok to Maggie Watching and more Major events, while David Dyar has remained in Bangkok blissfully wedded to Goy. Mr. and Mrs. Dyar win the FCCT's special **Happily Ever After Award**, and we all wish them many happy little broadcasters.

DR. SUVIT YODMANI

As we all know, Dr. Suvit has always been very good to the FCCT, and not just during his period as government spokesman. Although somewhat disappointingly attended due to "credible threats" from various quarters, he recently enthralled an FCCT Wednesday evening audience with a fascinating two-hour dissertation on his time in the limelight at Government House.

His pleasures there included being electronically necklaced each night by the Thai mass media. Dr. Suvit's talk was entitled Confessions of a Government Spokesman. Quite inexplicably, rumours have got out all over town that the FCCT videotaped the entire confession and hoped to air it on all television channels, with perhaps a few breaks included for military waltzes and foxtrots. The FCCT would like to go on record as saying that there is no truth whatever in this rumour — which isn't to say it doesn't make an excellent story — and that at no time did we plan to entitle this video, which doesn't exist, Sex, Lies and My Government Days. Instead, Dr. Suvit wins our best wishes for the next challenging step in his dizzying career, and this year's **Good Friend of the FCCT Award**.

DUBIOUS DISTINCTION AWARDS

STEVE ERLANGER

The urbane, distinguished bureau chief in Bangkok for the New York Times turned his flowing quill upon Indonesia last year, only to be portrayed as an "alcoholic" by a certain nameless French news agency, much to the embarrassment of one of its more aristocratic bureau chiefs. Erlanger had prompted a serious attack of the vapours in an Indonesian minister with an article alleging, farfetched as it may sound, corruption in the highest stratas of society there. The minister suggested the story had been concocted in a bar while our intrepid correspondent was under the influence of potent liquor, hence the French news report. The truth can now be told. The story was indeed partly researched in a bar, the highly respectable Clipper Bar at the Mandarin Oriental, and Steve was indeed sipping a well brewed beverage. Unconfirmed reports have it as either Earl Grey, Darjeeling or Jasmine, but it was certainly tea. Erlanger, who was denied visas for further coverage of Visit Indonesia Year (and who, probably quite coincidentally, is being packed off with a modest winter underwear allowance to cover the New York Times's Siberia beat) gets this year's **Tea And Leaves Award**.

PAUL WEDEL

Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council — no relation, we hope, to another little council close to all our hearts — is if nothing else unpredictable. Prior to the May general election last year, analysts were confidently predicting that no journalists would be allowed in to witness the proceedings. But at the eleventh hour, visas

were issued to just about every journalist imaginable — except high profile Burma watchers in the FCCT. SLORC's exclusion of Bertil Lintner was understandable enough, but why the mild-mannered, affable, modest and brilliant Paul Wedel of UPI? In the days that followed, Paul was as inconsolable as a teenager not invited to the party, moping into his buffet at the clubhouse and disappearing into Lumpini Park for long walks to brood on the vicissitudes of his cruel profession. Petitions to Ann Landers having come to nought, Paul may gather a little love and sympathy from our **Burma Wallflower of the Year Award**.

TERRY MCCARTHY

This FCCT stalwart has spent two and a half years in Bangkok with his thumb on the pulse of regional political developments and the other hand, whenever possible, around the waist of some delightful lady. Though life seemed kind to Terry, a few close friends were becoming aware of his growing frustration. After all that time in Bangkok, he was still unfulfilled — a virgin some even suggested. One did not have far to look for the problem: after all those years he had still not reported a Thai coup. Finally, a bright Saturday in late February arrived to take everybody by surprise: tanks were on the streets and scoops were everywhere. But Terry, the London Independent's man on the trouble spot was in Cambodia. The amazing Terry, realizing his mistake, promptly dived into a phone box and then showed the Vietnamese a thing or two about fast pullouts from Cambodia. No slouch he (unless you count proof-reading), Terry McCar-

thy was back in Bangkok by Sunday to pick up the Patiwat pieces with plenty of time left over to scoop the FCCT's coveted **Yoo-Hoo There's a Coup Award**.

ERSKINE MCCULLOUGH

The compact and energetic Agence France-Presse deputy bureau chief in Bangkok launched the FCCT's Golf Club virtually single-handed. Some of his more outrageous demands have, for the moment at least, been curbed by an ever cautious Executive Committee who are still pondering the wisdom of replacing the clubhouse television monitors with bunkers and using the snooker table as a putting green. An indignant Efkins, as certain Thai secretaries like to call him, was at one point rumoured to be plotting a coup after being spotted in a skin-tight shirt with a carton of Gauloise cigarettes stuffed down his socks and shouting "rib roy." But, as Erskine can vouch, even the best laid plans sometimes go astray. After weeks of meticulous preparation and plotting, the FCCT Golf Society finally met at the crack of dawn at Green Valley golf club on the outskirts of a slumbering City of Angels. A small problem: Efkins was simply nowhere to be seen. Mildly relieved and certainly unperturbed, the gallant FCCT golfers and their friends set off down the fairways without him. Some two hours later, a turbo-charged Suzuki Caribbean, tyres burning and expletives flying, burst upon the sedate Green Valley car park. Enter the furious FCCT Golf Captain who had, yes, overslept. For his late morning tee-off, he wins the FCCT's **Elevenses Award**.

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CHARLES ANTOINE
DE NERCIAT

Agence France-Presse's bureau chief floats on a social cloud far above most of his colleagues. French aristocratic origins notwithstanding, Charles Antoine De Nerciat is the only bureau chief in Bangkok who speaks English with a Cambridge accent — and even the Anglophile Steve Erlanger can't compete with that. Charles's forte is Cambodia, and colleagues have come to hold him in awe on the subject because he is in fact Cambodia's de facto foreign minister. Visiting Cambodian dignitaries are forever quoting AFP or prefacing their answers with, "Well, what does Charles say?" This authority derives from an intimate acquaintance with all aspects of Cambodian society. And that is why legend has it that Charles is the only correspondent in Bangkok who has so far managed to sit through all of one of Prince Norodom Sihanouk's many films. Since he finds himself without peer among the journalistic ranks of the FCCT, he wins its coveted **Cambodian Film Critic of the Year Award**.

ERIC BRIGHTON

Yet another year has passed, and the FCCT Club Manager continues to be inspired by Burma's smiling generals. Free and fair elections have been organized "according to the law"; complaints about human rights violations have been promptly referred to the chef; and dissident elements have been locked up in the pantry indefinitely. Last year, Eric received the FCCT's Old SLORC Award. This year he receives its special **More of SLORC Award** with the subscript: "I saved the FCCT."

MARY KAY MAGISTAD

Correspondents reporting Burma are often privileged to have reviews of their work published in the Working People's Daily, an esteemed state organ that some observers occasionally suspect may be riddled with deaf dyspeptic moles. These shadowy characters seem to have a distinct penchant for rechristening the targets of their ire in the foreign media. Oddly resonant special correspondents include Bartle Litner, Nick Gumming Bruce, Richard Goli, Michael Further, Erlanger Stevenjay, Andrew Darmem, James Brinker, Hermit Macdonald and Dominique Folder — a French tart, surely? An addition to this motley crew was the mysterious Mr. Merry Majester writing, or so it seemed, for the equally mysterious Time of London. It transpired that one of Mr. Merry Majester's articles had been picked up and broadcast into Burma by the BBC, that infamous old disseminator of subversive propaganda. How on earth could Mr. Majester know what was going on in "Myanmar Naing-Ngan" if he was in London, stormed the celebrated Burmese columnist and wit Bo Thanmani (General Steel) in the Working People's Daily. "I would like to ask this newsman who lives in London why he has written such falsehoods as if he were a fortune teller," fumed Bo Thanmani, evidently teetering on the brink of apoplexy. "Your saying that the people are dissatisfied after the holding of the election is not true at all. You are not in Yangon and you should not have written about this." Probably quite by coincidence, intrepid correspondent Mary Kay Magistad was in Rangoon (Yangon) at about that time filing sharp, up-to-the-minute reports for The Times of London. Since Mr. Merry Majester could not be with us, Mary Kay has graciously agreed to accept our first ever **Burmese Sex Change Award**. □

UNCLE CHAT

continued from page 7

very own home. Who ever said he was a man about the town? Just goes to show that you can't believe everything you read in the newspapers.

Uncle Chat was a generous host. We all received practical door prizes — rather, care packages containing a yellow towel, body soap and toothpaste. "Maybe he's trying to tell us something," a colleague told me while giving me a ride home.

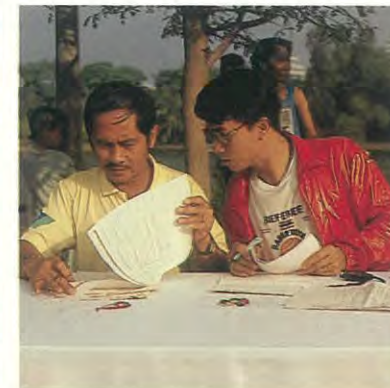
In his final days in office little love was lost between the ill-fated premier and the local press. Since many reporters were recent university graduates, he was not allowed to forget the self-immolation of a Ramkhamhaeng University student at an anti-government rally. Covering his two transparent cabinet "reshuffles" and one "change" of government were little more than typing exercises; all that was required was swapping a few titles and bringing in the odd opposition party.

Chatichai was not treated badly during the two weeks that followed the February 23 coup, if a series of official media announcements may be called a coup. Army television footage of the Royal Thai Air Force VIP guest house where he was "detained" reveal a Western-style bathroom and plush living quarters worthy of mention in the upmarket pages of the Thai Hotels Association directory. Room service was reportedly provided by his choice of restaurants.

His brief return to Bangkok to receive a royal award was timed purely by coincidence just ahead of Songkran and could in no way have reflected a desire to indulge in a little traditional new year revelry in his convertible living room. Asked by reporters how London was treating him, he said, "No problem." □

The annual FCCT Fun Run was kicked off by Deputy Supreme Commander Pichitr Kullawanijaya on the hazy morning of January 24 at Lumpini Park. But before the five-kilometer dash there was a bump and grind session directed by Fitness International's highly aerobic staff. The overall winner, Pitak Patjun, 22, of the Royal Thai Air Force Club sprinted home in 25 minutes and 2.28 seconds to claim his two return business class tickets to Seoul courtesy of Northwest Airlines.

Very special thanks are also due to our other sponsors: United Airlines, Nike, Milo, Kloster, Kodak, Nestle, Letter-Ads, the Minor Group, the Dusit Thani Group, Himali Cha Cha, the Menam, Siam Woo Industrial, 10 a.m. Lumpini Runners, Club Med Phuket, the Oriental, the Canadian Embassy, the Imperial, Royal Garden Village Hua Hin, Phuket Arcadia Hotel, the Regent Bangkok, Royal Cliff Beach Resort, Hotel Siam InterContinental, Empress Hotel and Convention Center and Hilton International Bangkok. □





The annual **Inaugural Ball** on March 2 at the Dusit Thani Hall witnessed the realm of possible dress codes that hacks, diplomats and Russian folk dancers could muster in one place and time. Dr. Suvit Yodmani graciously awarded door prizes courtesy of Cheney Tan & Van Outrive, Seagram's, Siam InterContinental, the 10 a.m. Lumpini Runners, the Re-



gent, the Menam, the Garden Room, Bourbon St., Bolero's, Bobby's Arms, Don Giovanni, the Oriental, Hamilton's Steak House, Ma Maison, Wandee Antiques, the Ayutthaya Princess, Royal Garden Village, Dusit Resort & Polo Club and Thai Airways International. Between dizzy spells and mirth, the dance floor had its tender moments.



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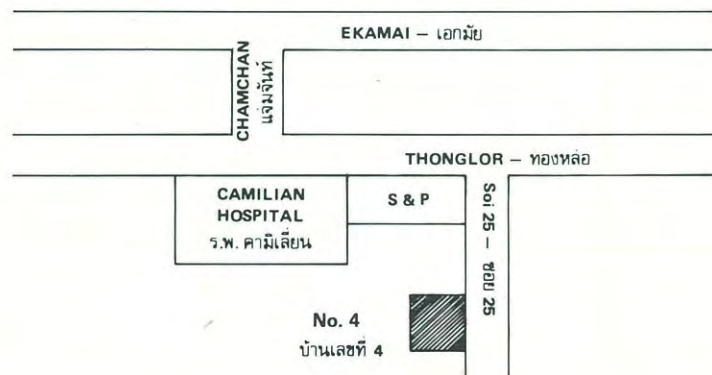
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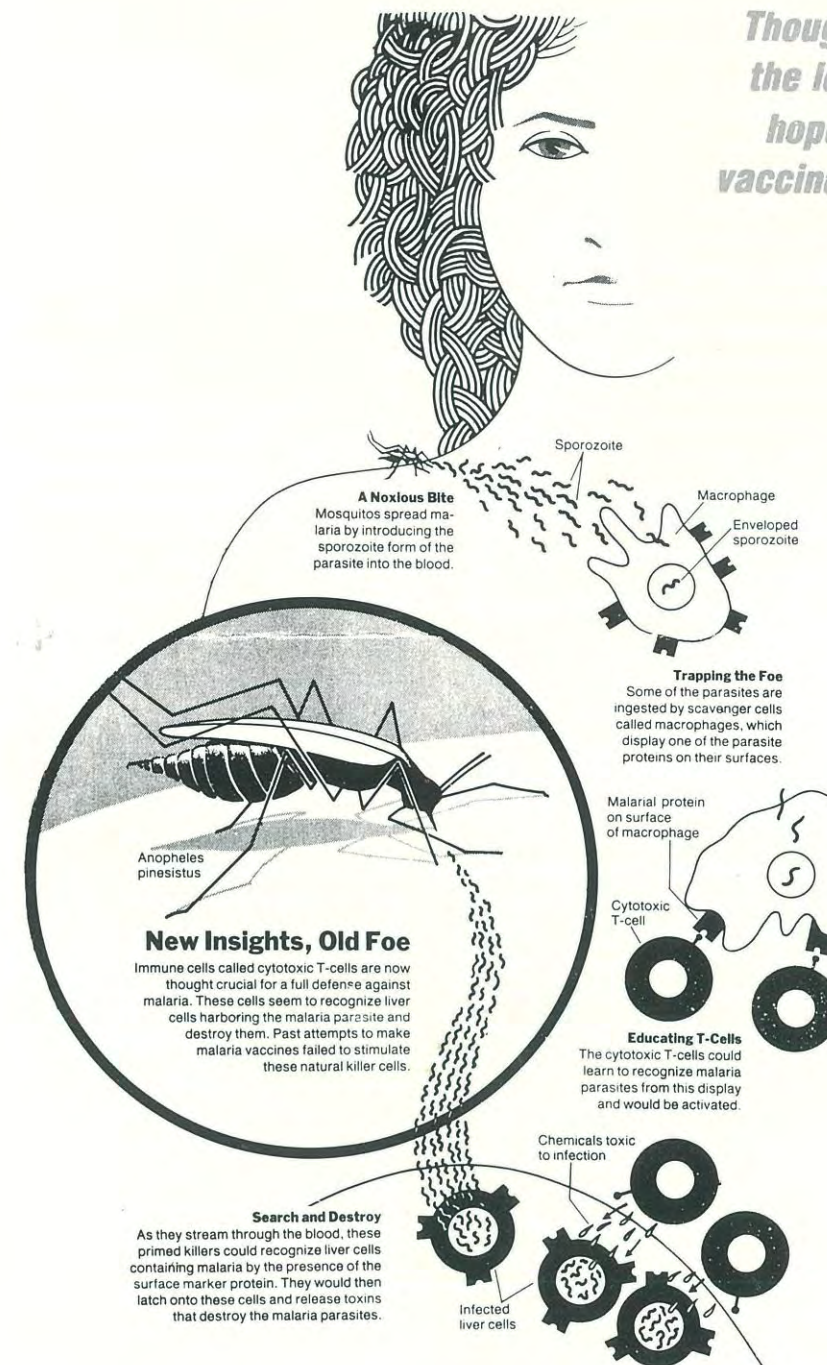
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Outwitted by Malaria, Desperate Doctors Seek New Remedies

Though the parasite now eludes the leading drug, findings raise hopes for new treatments and vaccines, as Elisabeth Rosenthal reports in this informative article reprinted from the New York Times (February 12, 1991)



MALARIA invulnerable to drugs is spreading across the world, leaving a widening trail of suffering and death.

Chloroquine, the drug that has long served as a golden bullet against malaria, no longer reliably prevents or cures the disease; the malaria parasite has learned to outwit it. And newer stand-ins are less effective or prohibitively expensive.

Driven by the dire need for treatments, scientists have come to a detailed new understanding of how the malaria parasite neutralizes drugs and how it interacts with the human immune system. They predict these discoveries will lay the groundwork for a two-flank assault: drugs to outsmart the parasite's resistance and, ultimately, vaccines to prevent people who are bitten by malaria-carrying mosquitos from getting the disease. But final products are probably years away and patients need help now.

"The situation is as serious as you can imagine," said Dr. Steven Hoffman, director of the malaria vaccine program at the Naval Medical Research Institute in Bethesda, Md. "Chloroquine doesn't work in many places, even in places where it is commonly used."

Chloroquine resistance, first noticed in isolated cases in Thailand and Colombia 25 years ago, has spread rapidly in the last 10 years and is now common in all countries with malaria, except Haiti and in Central America north of the Panama Canal.

The drug's failure has contributed to a surge of cases and deaths, both in residents of malaria zones and travelers.

The malaria parasite kills by bursting the blood cells it infects, causing anemia, and by clogging the arteries to the kidneys, lungs and brain. In Africa, its toll is apparent everywhere. In hospitals, infants lie gasping for air or locked in deep coma. Lethargic children with fevers line up at clinics to have their

blood checked for the malaria parasite, which is transmitted from person to person by mosquito bites.

Worldwide, there are a staggering 270 million new infections each year and an estimated 2 million deaths. In areas with severe malaria problems each resident gets bitten by a malaria-carrying mosquito every night.

Although alternatives to chloroquine have existed for years, they are only partly effective, involve cumbersome dosing or have serious side effects. Last year Hoffman-La Roche Inc. released a long-awaited new drug, mefloquine, that had been developed by Army researchers. But, at more than \$5 per capsule, it is too costly for poor nations. And although mefloquine is still considered effective for both prevention and treatment, dismayed doctors have already found strains of malaria that are invulnerable to it and to several other drugs in the development pipeline. They expect those strains to spread.

"It used to be simple to treat malaria," said Dr. James Jensen, a malaria researcher at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. "Now it can be very, very hard. That's what drives us all in this field."

In advances that may yield better drugs, scientists have found that some strains of the parasite carry a gene that allows infected cells to expel chemicals. Dr. Thomas Wellems and his team at the National Institutes of Health are closing in fast on a specific chloroquine resistance gene. If they can find an agent to block the action of such genes, they might be able to add it to chloroquine and return the drug to its former usefulness.

In another line of attack, scientists have successfully made people immune to malaria by subjecting them to hundreds of bites from parasite-carrying mosquitos that have been irradiated so the parasites are too weak to cause disease. By

studying the stoic volunteers, doctors are learning which distinctive surface features of the parasite are recognized by the immune system and how they goad it to action. They hope to duplicate the event in a vaccine.

"We have just begun to understand how complex this organism is," said Dr. Jensen. "That has helped us explain our failures. But it also will certainly lead to better approaches." □

A Spreading Menace

There are four types of malaria, caused by four related parasites. The most common and most deadly is falciparum malaria; it accounts for about 50 percent of cases and 95 percent of deaths. Another 40 percent of cases are caused by vivax malaria, which leads to fevers, anemia and debility, but rarely kills. The other two types of parasites, ovale and malariae, are uncommon.

It is not known exactly how many malaria cases there are worldwide, or how many are resistant to drugs, since most occur in sub-Saharan Africa where medical records are poor.

But it is clear that malaria, and its drug-resistant forms, are on the rise. In Asia and the Americas, the World Health Organization has detected "a clear upward trend" in malaria cases, and a spread of parasites resistant to chloroquine and other drugs. Several regions that were previously malaria-free, like Sri Lanka and the New Guinea highlands, have had malaria outbreaks in the last two years. In Africa, where malaria has traditionally been a rural problem, the disease has moved into the cities.

"Chloroquine resistance has knocked the wind out of control programs," said Dr. Jensen. To make matters worse, the ability to withstand drugs had been confined to falciparum parasites until last year; it has now been acquired by

some vivax parasites as well. Doctors say the spread of resistance has resulted not only in more cases, but also in more serious cases, which result when people waste precious time taking chloroquine to little or no avail. In several African cities there has been a dramatic rise in the number of patients who need to be hospitalized and the number who die.

Dr. Peter Bloland of the Centers for Disease Control, who works at a clinic in the African nation of Malawi, said that it has gotten very difficult to cure patients with chloroquine. In one study of 120 children treated with the drug, most felt better temporarily because the drug reduced the number of malaria parasites in their bodies. But only four were rid of parasites entirely.

"It's enormously frustrating treating malaria in the field: you see hundreds of patients, you treat them, and they just keep coming back."

"There's a wide range, from parasites that are killed quickly, to those with some resistance, to parasites that eat chloroquine for lunch," he said. Children inevitably bear the burden of death since people who receive frequent bites develop some immunity by the age of 5, which does not prevent infection but does dampen malaria's fury.

A difficult Puzzle

When chloroquine does not work, doctors have resorted to several second-line drugs, including Fansider and quinine, a drug extracted from bark that Jesuit priests in South America used centuries ago to treat fevers. But in some regions, like West Africa, up to 30 percent of strains may be resistant to Fansidar, said Dr. Hans Lobel of

the Federal Centers for Disease Control, and the drug can cause rare but life-threatening reactions. Many malaria parasites have some tolerance to quinine, as well and so today that drug must be taken for seven days in tandem with a second medication.

Doctors had hoped that the recently released drug mefloquine would hold the disease at bay for at least half a decade, and that two drugs currently in trials, halofantrine and artemisinin, could then take up the task. But those hopes were dashed last year when doctors found strains of malaria resistant to mefloquine in Thailand, and West Africa. And there is discouraging evidence that malaria that can resist mefloquine also has an innate invulnerability to the newer drugs as well.

"We thought we were on track, that the parasite couldn't be resistant to all these drugs since they were so different in structure," said Dr. Wilbur Milhous, group leader of the anti-malarial division at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Washington. "We never dreamed it would be so complicated."

Alarmed by such findings, many experts and the World Health Organization advocate using mefloquine only for travelers and life-threatening cases. "The arsenal is severely depleted and they want to have some weapons in reserve," Dr. Wellems said.

Scientists are now beginning to untangle the puzzle of drug resistance.

In 1987, Dr. Donald Krogstad at Washington University in St.

Louis discovered that cells infected with a resistant malaria parasite could not hold on to chloroquine. The drug was somehow pumped out of the cell before it had time to kill.

Two years later, scientists discovered that resistant malaria contained a so-called multiple drug resistance gene, a type of gene that had previously been identified in human cancers and is thought to contribute to tumors' resilience in the face of chemotherapy. Such genes cause cells to expel foreign substances and may endow some strains with resistance to many drugs at once.

Although malaria experts initially assumed that these genes were directly responsible for chloroquine resistance, new evidence suggests that a special gene results

in invulnerability to chloroquine and relegates the multiple drug resistance gene to an ancillary role. Dr. Wellems said his team hoped to announce success in locating a chloroquine resistance gene soon.

"We're seeing how a parasite changes its enzymes and genes to respond to environmental pressures," Dr. Wellems said. "We're working hard to use that knowledge to develop drugs to choke or block resistance."

Once scientists isolate a resistance gene, they hope to determine what kind of chemical it makes and to interfere with that compound's function. By trial and error, scientists have already figured out that certain medicines can plug the leaks, reversing the outflow of medicine in the test tube. Late last year, army researchers reported that they had successfully used one of these drugs

in tandem with chloroquine to treat a small number of humans infected with resistant malaria.

Hope for a Vaccine

But many scientists have concluded that the only long-term hope is a vaccine to prevent the infection. "It's enormously frustrating treating malaria in the field: you see hundreds of patients, you treat them, and they just keep coming back," said Dr. Hoffman of the Navy. For scientists, the search for a malaria vaccine has been a roller coaster ride of hopes and disappointments.

Five years ago, scientists discovered that a certain portion of a protein on the surface of the parasite, the circumsporozoite protein, would activate the immune system to produce antibodies against cells infected with malaria. At the time, scientists thought these antibodies were the body's prime defense against early malaria infection.

They created a vaccine whose active ingredient was the crucial segment of the protein, and gave it to volunteers, confident that it would stimulate the body to produce anti-bodies and that the patients would become immune. But they were not reliably protected.

New work indicates that the immune response is more complicated than had been thought and researchers are beginning to understand where they erred.

In laboratory mice, they have found that a second type of immune response, involving immune cells that target and kill malaria-infected cells, is crucial for the body's defense. The early vaccines did not stimulate these cytotoxic T-cells, which seem to be activated by a portion of the malaria parasite that is different from the portion the antibody defense recognizes. Malaria parasites reside for part of their life cycle in liver cells, and antibodies cannot penetrate this organ, although the killer cells can.

Dr. Victor Nussensweig and Dr. Ruth Nussensweig, husband and wife malaria researchers at the New York University Medical Center, are working to create a malaria vaccine combining protein fragments that will fire up both antibodies and T-cells.

The effort to understand immunity to malaria has been greatly helped by volunteers who allowed themselves to be bitten by hundreds of irradiated mosquitos in several sessions over a period of months. There are seven volunteers in all, three at the University of Maryland and four through the Department of Defense Malaria Vaccine Development Group.

At the price of some serious itching, the subjects became fully immune and did not contract the disease when bitten by malaria-carrying mosquitos from all over the world.

The immunity was far more profound than the partial protection many adults in the third world acquire as they age. "The immunity you get from 250 bites in an hour and a bite a night for 250 days seems to be quite different," Dr. Hoffman said.

Scientists used the technique in 1973, but dropped the work because the method was impractical for widespread immunization. That is still the case. But the tools of molecular biology now allow researchers to analyze the volunteers' immune response in ways impossible 20 years ago.

"We're involved in the slow process of figuring what happens when these people become immune and then trying to recreate that," Dr. Hoffman said. "It has been much more difficult than anyone had expected, but it's happening." The first papers based on armed services volunteers are due within a few months. Other scientists are working on shots that will stimulate the immune system to hold down the number of parasites in the

blood, although they will not prevent infection.

A Humbling Finding

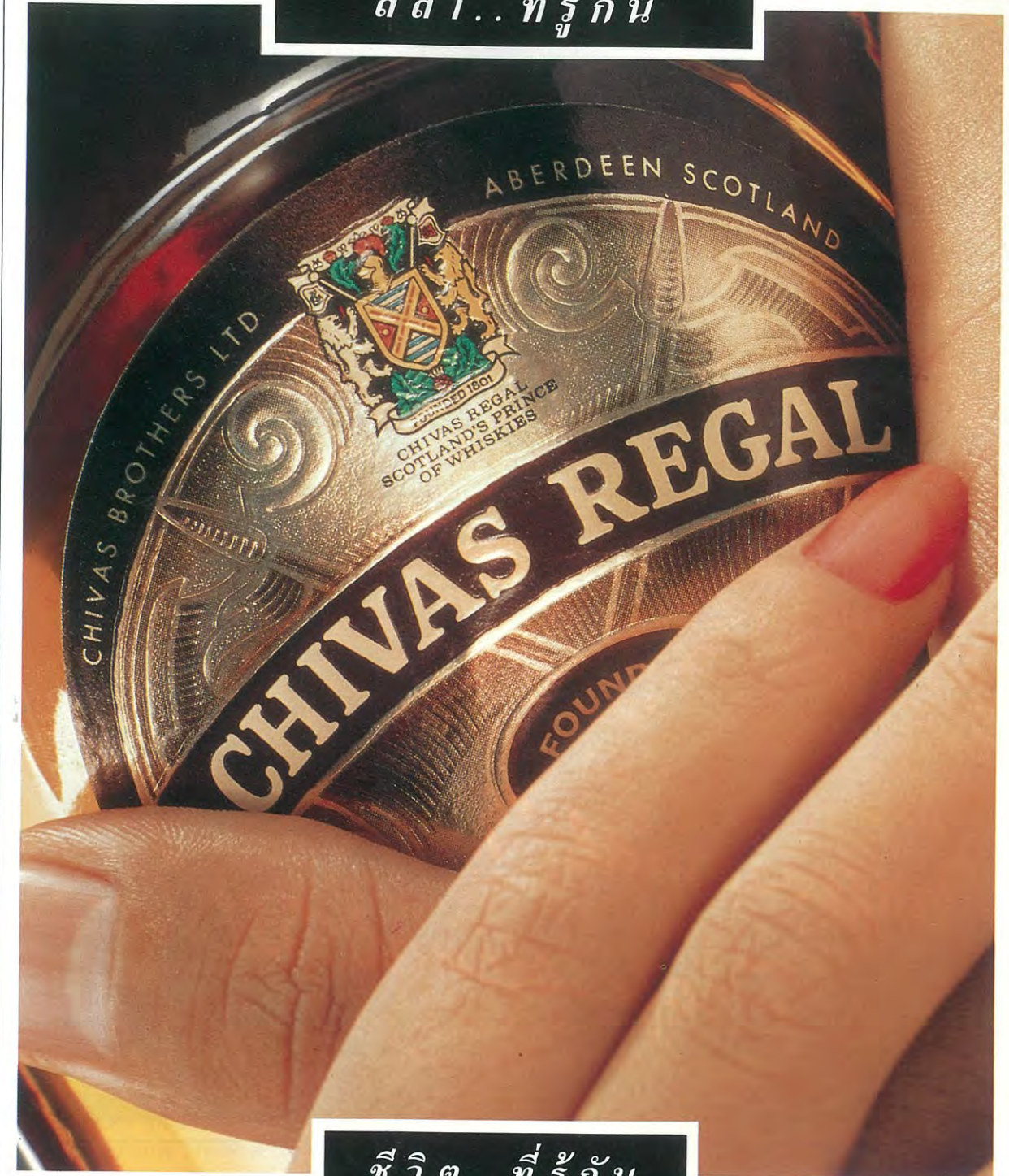
Both in drug and vaccine development, researchers have been humbled by the parasite's complexity.

Analysis of the organisms's genetic material has found that it is enormously variable. Dr. Jensen and collaborators at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland studied 600 people in a Sudanese village and found more genetic variation in the malaria there than had previously been known to exist in the entire world.

Such variability makes the disease hard to combat, since an effective vaccine must prime the immune system to recognize any strain. But just as all humans have two eyes, two ears and a nose, certain features of the parasite are also constant, and immunologists try to direct their vaccines against these.

Dr. Krogstad offered "great hope" that current research would produce new treatments, but said he did not expect quick fixes. "In the short term," he said, "we're going to have to muddle through with more deaths and an increase in resistant malaria in travelers." □

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Setting Burma Upright Again

In a new study on developments in Burma, a group of scholars examine the challenges facing this economically devastated country. Tan Lian Choo, who has had reporting assignments in Burma, reveals some key conclusions

Can a people remodel their state? By changing government, can they hope to change economic behaviour? If yes, then can the Burmese accomplish both these changes in this century?

These questions, posed by Dr John Badgley of Cornell University, focus on the prospects for Burma, or Myanmar, as its authorities want it to be called nowadays.

"Remodelling Myanmar" is a stimulating chapter of a new book, Myanmar Dilemmas and Options. Here, Dr Badgley argues that the two actions are essential if Burma is to escape the tortured path it has followed since independence:

"The poverty, the collapse of

public morale, the demise of a respectable civil service, judiciary, and professional military, the corruption of party democracy, and the continuing erosion of the people's confidence in the government in the eyes of the world: these conditions work against constructive change.

"Yet, it is possible, just barely possible, within the 1990s that fundamental economic and constitutional changes will so transform the country that this heartbreaking period will be seen as an essential phase in the political maturation of a people struggling to find their own path to modernity."

Dr Bagley is cautiously optimistic because, he says, matching a new government successfully with any traditional society is a "creative" task. Rarely is the fit acceptable the first time. Much of political history worldwide on this front is a record of failure.

But what chance is there for Burma? It is still ruled by a military junta that came to power with a coup d'etat on 18 September 1988.

General Saw Maung, the former Defence Minister who led the coup, now heads the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The Director of Intelligence, Brigadier Khin Nyunt is SLORC's Secretary.

The regime carried out its promise to hold free and fair elections. Yet, after the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in May last year, the regime showed no political goodwill, withholding power instead of handing it over to the newly elected civilian government.

Not only is the NLD's charismatic leader, Ms Aung San Suu Kyi still under house arrest, she is now being offered freedom in exchange for a pledge that she will give up her political fight. Several NLD cadres, including moderate ones, have also been given severe jail sentences.

Dr Badgley summarises the dilemmas or options discussed throughout the book by observing that Burma's military rulers must choose in the post-Ne Win era whether they wish to join with elements of a civilian leadership — to form a new coalition of military and civilian heroes — or to continue the self-defeating practices that have brought Burma to its knees.

If it chooses the latter, the military, or Tatmadaw will only bring opprobrium on itself.

Some see the ethnic diversity in Burma as a negative factor for the country's development. Others, more optimistic, regard this as a rich mosaic of cultures and communal traditions.

Whichever the case, few will argue with Dr Badgley's observation that the country is desperately in need of some kind of "political innovation". For the country to succeed, there must be a new political architecture — a design not previously established — to suit the country's complex political landscape.

However, for decades now, scholars have not been able to refocus discussion on which political economy best suits a country like Burma.

While the surrounding South-

east Asian countries have prospered in the post-war period, especially during the last two decades, Burma's moribund economy never looked set to take off.

General Ne Win seized power in 1962, establishing the Revolutionary Council that introduced the Burmese Way to Socialism. In 1973, the regime was forced to abandon some of its policies because of public unrest. During that time, the average annual growth rate of real Gross Domestic Product was 2.5 per cent.

The annual rate of growth of per capita GDP during the 1962-73 period was 0.5 per cent, according to Dr Mya Than and Dr Joseph LH Tan, the two economists who jointly edited the book.

In 1974, the regime introduced a new, East European-inspired constitution, after which a long-term plan was adopted. This plan gave the agricultural sector priority over the industrial one, and recognised the role of the private sector in economic development.

Incentives given to farmers in a bid to boost rural efficiency and productivity were among some of the key reforms introduced, which in turn contributed to the recovery during the late 1970s of the Burmese economy.

However, after 1983, export earnings began to decline, following shortfalls in rice procurement and the falling world price of rice. The economy deteriorated further, until it finally collapsed in the mid-1980s.

With the right marketing and price policies — especially those that encourage free-market forces — plus an improved infrastructure and incentives to give impetus to achieving higher productivity, Burma might still see a revitalised agricultural sector that can uplift the economy generally.

But the longer it waits, the more impossible this will be. Competition for Burma's rice exports is

for all to see — even if the country succeeds in expanding its agricultural production, it will face strong competition in rice exports from Thailand, the US, Pakistan and, lately, even Vietnam.

Until early 1988, Vietnam imported rice. Today, it exports about 1.3 million tons of rice annually.

Thailand expects to increase its rice production steadily — it already exports some 6 million tons yearly while the US exports 1.3 million tons.

The low quality of Burmese rice, compared to the improved grains from Thailand and the US, will also act to Burma's disadvantage.

Rangoon authorities, if they seriously want to improve Burma's rice export performance, must start with the basics, including investing in better rice mills and improved storage facilities.

This is but one of the observations in the study on Burma's agricultural policy reforms and agricultural development by Drs Mya Thanh and Nobuyoshi Nishizawa.

In another study, "Monetary and fiscal policies for development", U Myat Thein showed that Burma already had a fairly well-developed financial market in 1957.

Unfortunately, Ne Win's policies brought about demonetization, a cut in salaries of bank personnel and a change in the system of accounting and interest rates on loans and deposits to conform with the one used by the State Commercial Bank.

Later, the regime set about establishing a monolithic bank, the People's Bank of Burma, which functioned as the only bank in the country. It acted as the central bank as well as a commercial one.

Similar nationalisation was carried out in trade and industry, as well as in other key sectors of the economy.

By 1972, foreign exchange re-

serves had sunk to an all-time low of about US\$52 million. In that same year, the requirement for the limitation of currency and demand deposits to 25 per cent of international reserves was abolished by the government.

At the end of the 1980s, the financial sector was even less developed than it was before the 1963 nationalisations.

All this means that Burma today desperately needs an expansion of its financial sector. The country has to start with the basics — encourage savings across the country, introduce new financial assets like bonds, shares, debentures and mortgages, as well as create more financial institutions to act as savings banks that can extend credit on a strictly commercial basis.

One way is to allow foreign banks to set up operations but this is probably still a taboo subject for Burma's inward-looking authorities.

The country's fiscal policies also need an overhaul. Unless the country succeeds in gradually reducing and finally eliminating chronic deficits, there can never be economic stability in the country.

There is always a temptation for the government to draw revenue by taxing heavily on profits of private companies. But, warned U Myat Thein, such a policy will adversely affect the country's growth.

A generally revised income tax structure might be the answer instead, since the tax ratio of 7 per cent of GDP is low by international standards.

For Burma to cherish any hope of transforming itself from one of the world's poorest nations into a prospering Southeast Asian nation, some of the options available now must be given due consideration.

MYANMAR DILEMMAS AND OPTIONS, edited by Mya Than and Joseph LH Tan, is published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore. It is available here at Asia Books. □

CLUB NEWS

The Gulf War dominated the professional arena for the beginning of the year — some of the FCCT jungle rats being drafted into the deserts after doing their push-ups, the rest watching the whole affair on television until the government stopped the blanket coverage, apparently responding to a letter in the Bangkok Post from **Norman Bottorff**. **Denis Gray** earned his stripes with the US Marine Corps, notching up a series of scoops for AP and emerging from the ordeal in a shape that can only be described as considerably more aerodynamically efficient. Also munching on C-rations were **David McKaige** and **Derek Williams**, who returned to Bangkok with video footage that sounded better with rock music. **Kevin Cooney** put in time for Reuters, then went off to Manila to recover in the shadow of the U.S. bases.

Charles Wallace of the L.A. Times spent part of the war in Bahrain pricing duty-free watches between Scud alerts, while his colleague from New Delhi, **Mark Fineman**, a frequent FCCT migrant, played cat and mouse with Jordanian authorities in Amman. Also in Amman was former FCCT photographer **Bob Nickelsberg**, who is still nursing a creaky jaw from a set of dissenting Palestinian knuckles. Special plaudits to former Presidentissima **Yuli Ismartono**, who was one of the few hacks to stay in Baghdad for the beginning of the air war — three days of near-continuous bombardment during which Yuli, in her own words, "thought this was it." But she emerged unscathed, and doubled Tempo's circulation back in Indonesia with her reports.

Meanwhile back in the Land of Smiles there was a coup, staged most inconveniently on a quiet Saturday morning when an amazing

proportion of the foreign press corps was out of the country, out of town, or quite simply out of it. **Denis Gray**, who has been in Thailand for a large part of this century and has managed to miss every single coup, had a tenable excuse with the Gulf War, but other hacks sunning themselves on various beaches were not so lucky with their editors.

Stories have otherwise been slow in Asia, overshadowed by the Desert Storm. **Paul Wedel** travelled up to the Golden Triangle to find human rights activist Khun Sa complaining that he was sadly "misunderstood" by the foreign press. Meanwhile **James Pringle**, the indefatigable Cambodia enthusiast, discovered that Pol Pot had joined the international environment awareness trend. The hardy Scot also narrowly missed an invitation to afternoon tea with animal-lover Ta Mok, one of Pol Pot's trusted lieutenants. Last news of Pringle was that he was on his way to Phnom Penh, possibly to see if the Hun Sen government was going to use environment-friendly recycled paper for issuing riel banknotes.

John Molloy, an expert on the Laotian economy and other apocrypha, has shaken the dust from his sandals and returned to the U.S. while **Sandro Tucci**, formerly Time magazine photographer in Bangkok, has taken up a job as media relations officer with the U.N. on the West Bank, with a residence in Jerusalem.

Boris Chekhonin of TASS has been enthusiastically infusing the FCCT with the best of Russian culture, although a proposal to bring Soviet acrobats to the club had to be turned down because of the height of the ceiling. A sadder tale surrounds **Leon Schadeberg**, a Hong Kong based photographer

who frequently passes through Thailand. The brave Leon was working on a series of postcards for **John Everingham**, and decided the shot he needed of Phuket was best obtained from a parasail pulled up over the beach by a boat. After carefully observing the parasailing and noting a 100% success rate in returning the parachutist to dry land, Leon ventured into the heavens with several thousand dollars worth of cameras around his neck. Unfortunately the boat broke down, plunging Leon and cameras into the brine: Leon is O.K., the cameras less so.

A sense of loss has permeated some members. **Robert Karniol**, a man known for his clear head, has apparently been photographed with tinted locks tumbling over his forehead in somewhat dubious circumstances by **Peter Charlesworth**, while **Nat Thayer** is claiming loss of memory from malaria and **David Brunstrom** is lamenting the loss of Mozart airs emanating from Aung San Suu Kyi's house in Rangoon.

But the greatest losses of all have been occurring on the golf course, in the FCCT golf outings on the last Thursday of every month. Few of our ardent golfers seem to realise what fairways are built for, and many have been sighted on what can only be regarded as nature walks through trees and ditches, occasionally issuing vague obscenities in the interests of conservation. Club Presidentissimo **Dominic Faulder** managed to lose 11 balls on his first round, and in the March outing he was unceremoniously disqualified by **Erskine McCullough** (the most burgled hack in town) for returning a score of six strokes on a hole in which he admitted to losing three balls. The Professional Committee (Golf Ethics subcommission) is looking in to the matter. □

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