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EDITORIAL OFFICE
*Dusit Thani Hotel
Room 428
946 Rama IV Road
Bangkok 10500
Tel: 237-4764*

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CLUB NEWS LETTER FROM THE BOARD

The undoubted highlight of the past quarter was Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun's keynote address to some 450 FCCT members and guests. The actual audience in fact went well beyond the sustantial confines of The Dusit Thani's ballroom thanks to Sutichai Yoon. The Nation's indefatigable editor, donning extra hats as TV anchorman and simultaneous translator, broadcast the Prime Minister's visit uninterrupted on Channel 9 for well over an hour. Many considered it the most polished performance by a Thai political figure on an international stage in years. The live audience was not confined to Thailand. VOA correspondent David Dyar enjoyed the pleasantly incongruous experience of watching the entire proceedings ensconced in his hotel room in Vientiane.

But the awesome pervasiveness of television can be a scourge, and a lively debate has raged within the normally languid FCCT Clubhouse over the uncritical use of monitors. Hardliners consider them a deterrent to any sort of meaningful social intercourse given the awkward floorspace. It must be said that a controversial three-month experiment with restricted usage has proven little either way, and moderate elements have rightly stressed the need for reasonable access to broadcast news.

A self-styled "couch potato" lobby has solemnly protested its right to vegetate before the great electric tuber, while the club's "social glitterati" have struggled to evanesce sparkling conversation against a mini torrent of (with one very witty initial exception) remarkably abusive epistles. After being reassured that these were not written in Japanese simply because one had emerged from a fax machine, Club Manager Eric Brighton, armed only with a

pair of Gurkha-issue vulcanized tweezers, set about deciphering the cantankerous communiques. His report to the Executive Committee detailed no wholesale death threats – or for that matter any trace of the President's long-awaited invitation to interview General Ne Win. So, this being Thailand, a compromise has been effected and a monitor made available for viewing at all times in an area that does not intrude upon those using the bar or enjoying a meal. Pax?

The abuse unleashed upon the board by the chippier ('pomme friteier' in one case- members of the couch potato faction was positively mellifluous when compared to the efforts of a columnist in Burma's distinguished daily organ, The Working People's Daily. As readers of this historic journal will soon discover, one of our most dogged correspondents has been irreverently described as, ahem, "a barking dog". He has since been spotted growling in his beer, or pausing mid-sniff around the buffet, usually to gnaw on his pipe or chew off a colleague's ear about this wholly gratuitous attack upon the canine community at large.

Dateline editor Michael Shari – sadly, this is his last issue – is a fair-minded soul who felt that the wounds allegedly suffered by Burma's invanquishable in the rough paws of Bangkok's "mercenary" pack of braying newshounds should at least be aired more widely. No matter that the attacks were patently attempts to prompt further disintegration in the "solidarity, unity and sovereignty" of our mangy tanks. Sad to say, outgoing club gossip columnist Terry McCarthy, that unrivalled master of the typo-laden libel, shuned the whole controversy, snaling: "I don't give a woof."

Applications please. □

Endangered Species That I Have Eaten

In the jungles of Cambodia, the guerrillas eat whatever is available - often animals that would be protected in other countries. Nate Thayer of Associated Press samples the exotic cuisine of the guerrillas and discovers a whole new approach to life.



Guerrillas backpack with lunch.

If I had known there had not been an official sighting of the beast since 1967, it probably wouldn't have tasted so good.

The Kouprey is indeed rare, with only occasional unconfirmed reports of vestiges of the elusive jungle cow coming from inaccessible regions of northern Cambodia and southern Laos.

Among the various fighting factions that frequent the forbidding jungles of northern Cambodia, nearly everybody claims to have seen one, and they frankly equate its import almost exclusively to an opportunity for a battalion-sized banquet. Anything that moves is viewed as not much more complicated than dinner.

The concerns of conservationists, no matter how noble, are not high on the agenda of your average guerrilla.

A little culinary variety, however, ranks right up there with wrestling control of the country from the puppet lackeys of the race exterminating Vietnamese regional hegemonists.

Travels with the guerrillas in-

variably produce more interesting experiences than news, and their eating habits are but one aspect of a very particular outlook on life.

One night, a few weeks into a walk through uninhabited jungles of the north, I was lounging around a campfire after dinner, when a huge hairy insect landed on my shirt.

The soldier squatting next to me nonchalantly picked it off its perch on my shoulder, examined it briefly over the light of the fire, and popped the squirming bug into his mouth, all without noticeable interruption to his monologue on Vietnamese designs to annex Cambodia.

It was then that I realized I was dealing with people with a fundamentally different approach to life.

A guerrilla diet consists of rice

and salt, supplemented by whatever one can shoot.

In Siem Reap, north of the Angkor temple complex, lie hundreds of square kilometers of a jungle called Prey Saak - literally "thick forest" - which is home to elephants, tigers, Kouprey, snakes, crocodiles, deer, wild pig, and thousand of species of very alarming insects.

Guerrillas and villagers in the northern Cambodian provinces of Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, and Kompong Thom speak of the mass exodus in the early 1970s of tigers, elephants, and a variety of other animals which trekked solemnly en masse north toward the Laotian border during the prolonged U.S. bombing campaigns.

It is these thick jungles and



A little culinary variety is high on most guerrilla lists.

largely uninhabited regions of the far north that they now share with anti-government forces.

The growth is more horizontal than vertical, and jungle paths made by elephants are used by guerrillas, many of whom have lived here for years. The government, smartly, refuses to venture into the forest, having long abandoned it to the guerrillas and creatures.

Most of a guerrilla's life is spent getting from one place to another, with dawn to dark hikes the norm. One trip took 32 days over mountains and minefields, across enemy lines and secret jungle trails, to newly seized villages and frontlines in Kompong Thom.

During the daily treks, shots would intermittently ring out as some creature became someone's dinner. Huge lizards, deer and various other creatures would be accumulated over the day, tied on to someone's pack and prepared later for the evening meal.

Crossing rivers always proved exciting. Here the Khmers demonstrated unique fishing methods. A couple of guerrillas would be dispatched slightly upstream, where

they used their training in bridge demolition to chuck a couple sticks of dynamite into the river, creating a huge explosion resulting in scores of stunned fish floating to the top. Everyone then jumps into the raging waters to retrieve as many as possible before they are swept downstream.

Once, I was accompanying a group of soldiers who were on a foray against the besieged district capital of Svay Chek. I had a nasty case of pneumonia manifesting itself in a loud cough which, they grumbled, was threatening to give away their position, making everyone very nervous.

The government launched a preemptive attack that night overrunning a few key guerrilla positions nearby, forcing our retreat to a nearby village.

That was fine with me because I felt lousy and was increasingly wondering why I was getting shot at in this obscure jungle with people who didn't want me there, covering a news story that virtually nobody wanted to read about anyway.

While lunching on fried lizard and homemade rice wine, one of

the commanders took pity on me, said he had just the cure for my cough, and dispatched a subordinate to purchase a duck.

Presently, a live duck was produced, and a man with a hatchet proceeded to hack off its beak, and let the blood flow into a half-full bottle of rice wine.

"Here, drink this," he said cheerfully. "It will cure your illness."

"Why didn't you just kill the duck?" I inquired, trying to avoid eye contact with the beakless but very much alive duck, which was staring at me.

"In order for the medicine to work, it must be blood from the beak of a live duck," he replied. "Blood from other parts of the duck won't work."

It didn't taste bad, and shortly I felt much better, although it was unclear whether it was the duck's beak blood or the rice wine.

This is, however, war, and all is not sightseeing.

During one trip the government put a 1,000-dollar reward out for my capture, and seized villages hours after I visited. We monitored government radio as they updated the





Duck's beak blood is a recommended cure for pneumonia; but giant lizards ...

whereabouts of my lastest sighting, never failing to mention the reward.

"They were looking for the American. More than 300 of them," a farmer told us in one village in Siem Reap. "Which way did the American go? How long ago was he here?"

One terrifying night, we fled through jungle from 600 soldiers stalking us after clashing with the guerrillas' advance team in charge of our security.

The guerrillas moved me every night, fearing that government snipers disguised as villagers were seeking the reward, which was more than ten years' income for the average Cambodian. They attempted to disguise me in traditional scarves covering my face when we passed through areas of dubious allegiance.

"I think you're worth more than 1,000 dollars," one guerrilla commander said to console me.

Often hundreds of villagers would gather, some walking for days, to get their first glimpse of a foreigner.

"Are they all fat and bald?" asked one old woman who sat and

stared at me for hours. Another estimated my age at 65. (I am 31).

Once, while lounging in a hammock at midday, near a contested area close to Sisophon, a government forward observer spotted us, relayed coordinates back to their rocket position, and scored a perfect hit. Two soldiers sleeping less than ten meters from me were killed because they didn't here the incoming rounds.

Malaria is epidemic, causing the death of thousands every year. Once, after a few days of walking in a jungle during which we saw no other people, we came across the body of a young Khmer Rouge soldier lying on the path. Ants were eating him. But when someone touched him, he moved. He had been lying there for four days, abandoned by his unit. We fed him malaria medicine.

One soldier, quite heroically, carried him on his back for days until the guerrilla was able to walk. One night, complementing the soldier on his selflessness, he related that he had been rescued by Sihanoukist forces under exactly the same cir-

cumstances, after being left to die in the jungle several years earlier.

But the biggest danger in Cambodia – and it will remain long after the war is over – are landmines.

Tens of thousands are strewn throughout the countryside. Every time soldiers from one group or another seize a piece of territory, the first thing they do is surround it with mines. And when it is overrun, they leave the mines behind, and the victors plant their own.

There are mines that hang from trees, are buried under the ground, are attached to trip wires, or pressurized to go off only under the weight of a vehicle.

Far more people are injured by mines than anything else. The guerrillas' standard mine sweeping procedure is to put a couple of guys "trained" in mine-detection up at the front of the line with bamboo sticks who stare intently at the ground, occasionally poking it gently. Everyone follows them single file.

One trek over the mountains near the Thai-Lao border was horrifying. We saw dozens of mines, their



Most of a guerrilla's life is spent getting from one place to another.

thin green wires blending with the thick green foliage. Around us were trees with pieces of clothing hanging off branches; they belonged to the unlucky who had travelled this way before. For hours no one spoke, their eyes locked on the ground, hopping from rock to rock where possible.

Another time we weren't so lucky. The guerrillas had siezed a large number of villages in the north-west that week, and I was touring the area. Heavy fighting continued, and confusion prevailed.

Hundreds of government militiamen had surrendered or defected and it was still unclear who controlled what.

I was travelling with a convoy of motorcycles until mine broke down, leaving me alone with one trooper. Night had fallen and I was trying to get back to Thailand. The shadow of the Dongruk escarpment, marking the border, loomed to the west, but it became clear that my companion and I were lost.

"Hey, Savuth," I asked my guerrilla companion, "are there any mines around here?"

"No," he assured me, "there are no mines."

"Well, uh, Savuth, do you know where we are?"

"I have no idea," he said, matter of factly, "this is my first time in this area. But Thailand is that way."

Not wanting to ponder the alarming contradiction in his two replies, I concentrated on getting back to Thailand.

Several hours later, we were still in the muddy jungle, without any doubt very lost, when I heard a vehicle idling ahead.

"Hey, Savuth, you hear that?" I whispered.

He nodded.

We left the path and walked quietly parallel to the source of the sound about 100 metres ahead.

There idling in the clearing, about twenty metres from us, as we peered through the trees, was a heavy Soviet transport truck with four soldiers in government uniforms carrying Soviet AK-47s.

"I think we took a wrong turn," I whispered, not being able to think of anything more intelligent to say.

"I think they are defectors to our side," he said confidently.

I stared at him wide-eyed, anticipating his implicit suggestion that we just wander on over and say hi.

"Look, we don't know where we are, where we have been, or who these people are. What we do know is that they are dressed as government soldiers, are carrying government weapons, and are driving a government truck," I said rather reasonably.

Savuth assured me he had heard that a couple of government trucks with soldiers had indeed defected in the past couple days. "We are too close to the mountain for them to be government," he said weakly.

I was thirsty, tired, and unclear as to what black curse had descended to have me walking around in this strange jungle, documenting arguably irrelevant conflicts for negligible amounts of money.

If I was stupid enough to find myself in this current pickle, it didn't really matter if we took another step further into this ridiculous situation.



Landmines are the biggest hazard in Cambodia.



Nate Thayer looks marginally better than the truck he was in. (photo by Philip Blenkinsop)

And anyway I didn't have a better answer.

Savuth was right.

"Hey, the White guy," they laughed, "We heard you were around here somewhere." I failed to see the humour in it at all.

We piled in the truck and headed back for the border with no headlights at typical breakneck speed.

I never heard the explosion when the two anti-tank mines threw the truck in the air like a Tonka toy, and thousands of shards of metal shot through the air reducing it to a carcass.

I knew something terrible had happened, but I had no idea what.

The truck lay on its side. I had been sitting next to the driver, who was lying dead beside me. A severed leg was lying across my lap.

I crawled out of what had been the windshield, into the darkness and mud. Several bodies lay on the ground, some moaning, others dead or silent. Blood was pouring from my head, and my foot was mangled and bleeding.

Savuth, who had been blown from the back of the truck, lay unconscious in the mud. He suddenly jumped up, tore his pants down, and inspected himself. A rather bizarre reaction.

Two died and three were seriously wounded. Guerrillas from a nearby enclave arrived and those missing limbs or unconscious were loaded onto hammocks or slung on sticks.

We began a silent hour's walk back to the Thai border, where we were taken to a guerrilla field hospital.

Guerrilla medics operated on me, removing shrapnel from my leg and stitching up my feet and head. I later found I had a broken sternum.

The increasing prospects of peace in Cambodia will be welcomed by everyone, including journalists.

There are many things to be done. As one guerrilla told me one night while thousands of bugs swarmed around a jungle campsite: "After peace, we really need to do something about this insect problem." □

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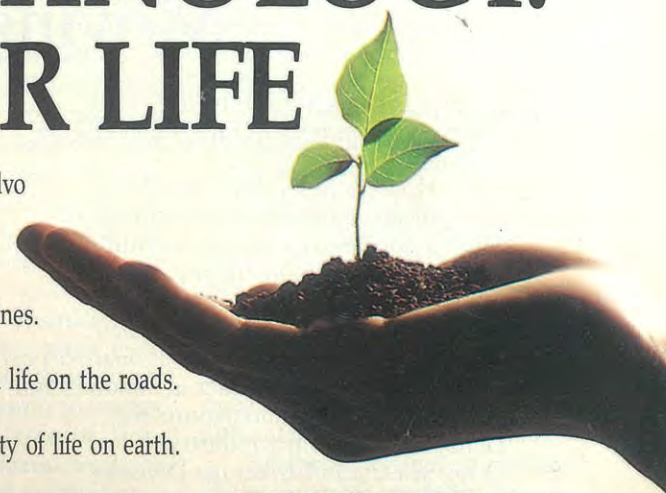
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It's Not Only The Mosquitoes...

*If our last issue told you everything you wanted to know about malaria but were afraid to ask, let FCCT President **Dominic Faulder** tell you a little more, and then some.*

Vietnam spent six weeks in Australia recovering from typhoid contracted while convalescing from a bout of cholera.

Another emerged from Cambodia some years ago with a Canadian colleague and went down a week later with cerebral malaria. In Bangkok, his condition was quickly diagnosed and treated. The Canadian became ill only after reaching Hong Kong, where there is less experience of the disease. He died.

An American journalist recently returned from Burma with diarrhoea, severe stomach cramps and foul wind. It was quickly identified in Bangkok as giardia, a relatively easy ailment to treat. The Thai doctors were astonished, however, to see a medieval variety of the parasite dancing beneath their microscope, some ancient cousin of the little brutes they are well accustomed to dealing with.

An Irish journalist who spent some days in a remote jungle area let his foot slip out one night from under the mosquito net. It ended up so severely bitten he could hardly walk, and the malaria he contracted very nearly killed him. Diagnosis was simple enough, but finding the right treatment to combat the particular variety took agonising days. Visitors found him only marginally more delirious than usual.

Another British journalist succumbed to malaria after being given prophylactic tablets by a city doctor who failed to advise him on further barrier precautions – essential since many varieties of malaria are drug-resistant. Indeed, oral prophylactics are often next to useless in many parts of Asia, and because of their undesirable side-effects they are best avoided by travellers who only intend to visit dense centres of population where the incriminated mosquito vectors cannot survive.

"Get advice from an expert on

anti-malarials since the drug resistance pattern is different in each country," advises Professor Stephen Oppenheimer of the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Medicine. But while drug-resistance is a problem with malaria, prompt diagnosis and precise intervention will provide a cure, even if the side effects in stubborn cases are often pretty unpleasant.

Malaria is by no means the only mosquito-borne disease to be wary of in Asia. A tragic recent case involved a Canadian journalist who contracted a variety of encephalitis, probably in Thailand near the Burmese border. More than six months later, he is still confined to a wheelchair and faces years of rehabilitation.

Japanese encephalitis, a virus that attacks the brain, is peculiar to Asia and, in the words of one American doctor in Bangkok: "It can destroy a person." The good news is that there is a vaccine, which can be administered in two shots over a one or two-week period, with boosters every two years.

Another unpleasant and widespread mosquito-borne disease for which there is no vaccine is dengue, sometimes referred to as "breakbone fever" because of the terrible aches it causes. Unlike malaria, this can be contracted in relatively dense urban areas, but is very seldom life-threatening to healthy adults. The virus can, however, progress to a haemorrhagic stage in children, which is difficult to treat and may be fatal.

Methods of physical prophylaxis recommended by doctors against mosquitoes include staying within screened areas after dark, keeping the skin properly covered at all times in high-risk areas, employing good insecticides and proper repellents (which because of evaporation should be re-applied every 45 minutes), and the use of mosquito

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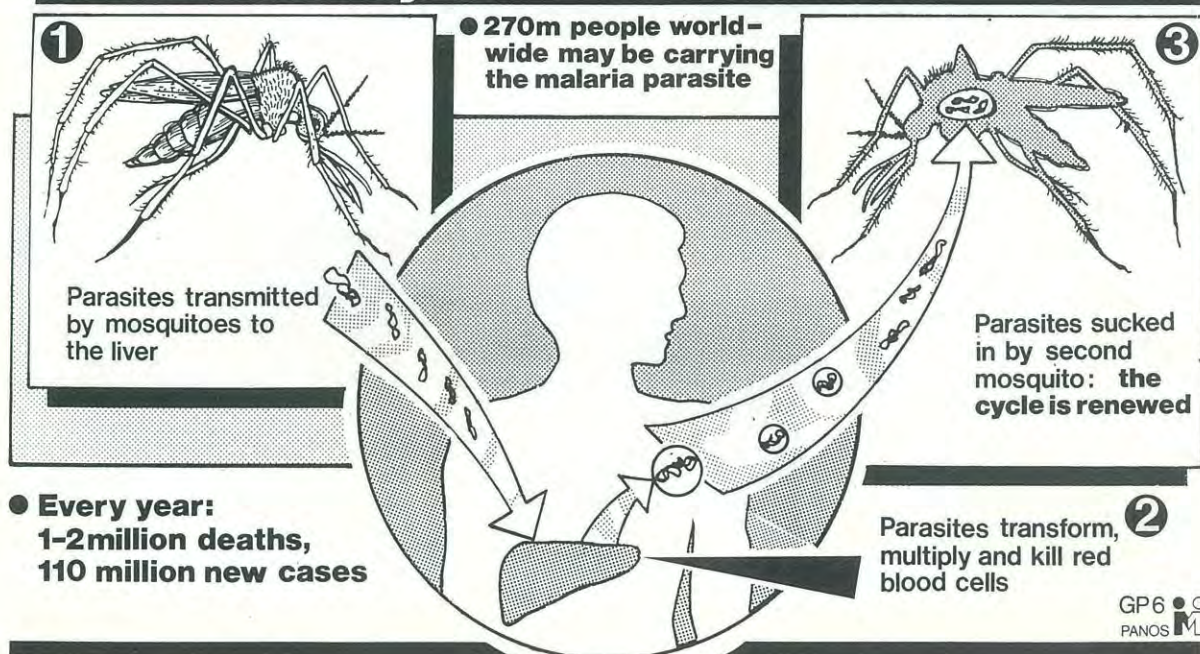
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The malaria cycle



nets at night, especially in non-air-conditioned surroundings.

Another highly recommended precaution for Asia is against rabies, which is widespread and fatal once it gets a hold. It is usually transmitted in the bite of a warm-blooded animal – dogs, cats and even bats. Travellers should be especially wary of monkeys and young bears, which are still unfortunately sometimes found chained up in Asian restaurants and bars as a supposed amusement for clients.

Rabies represents an especially serious hazard in Bangladesh, Burma, China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Siberia, Sri Lanka and, most of all, India which accounts for some 40 per cent of the 50,000 rabies deaths reported annually to the World Health Organisation. As with most such statistics, this is likely to be considerably less than the actual figure. If bitten, or even licked on broken tissue, assume the worst and seek medical help immediately.

Rabies treatments have improved immensely in recent years,

and pre-exposure immunisation is recommended for anyone resident in or visiting a rabies-endemic area. This allows more time for the bite victim to seek treatment – absolutely essential in countries with poor health care infrastructure. Boosters should be taken every three years. Post-exposure treatment consists of a course of six shots given over a 90-day period. Patients who fail to keep up with the treatment schedule risk having to start again from scratch.

Doctors in the tropics advise three basic immunisations – hepatitis B, tetanus and typhoid. The first two are injectable vaccines and the third oral. After a test to see if hepatitis-B antibodies are already present, in which case vaccination is unnecessary, the course is administered in three shots over a five-month period, with the second after three months and boosters every five years thereafter.

Gamma globulin shots, which can be administered every two to four months, are sometimes recommended for travellers as temporary

protection against both hepatitis-A and B if there is no time for the B course. Hepatitis-A is less lethal than hepatitis-B, a virus that attacks the liver and is a well established killer.

Protection against tetanus comes in a course of three injections of tetanus toxoid over six months, with the second shot given in the second month. Boosters are recommended every 10 years. Protection against typhoid can be taken orally on an empty stomach in three stages over a five-day period, with the second capsule taken on the third day.

Also recommended is an oral booster against polio for those who have already received oral or injectable vaccine. Countries in which polio is endemic include Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Other vaccines it may be worth discussing with a physician prior to a trip if they have not previously been administered are for measles (if you haven't already had them), and BCG for tuberculosis (which, though

widespread, usually requires relatively protracted exposure to contract). Meningococcal vaccine may also be recommended, especially for those planning visits to Nepal, Pakistan and India.

Cholera vaccines are of limited and short-lived efficacy, and noted for their unpleasant side-effects. Work is under way on less obnoxious vaccines that may become available relatively soon, but until then routine vaccinations are not recommended by WHO.

Mild stomach disorders quite often result simply from a change of environment and will right themselves relatively quickly. Severe diarrhoea, which if it includes the passage of blood is dysentery, requires prompt medical attention, especially if accompanied by a temperature. Self-medication in Asia is easier than almost anywhere else, but it may only serve to postpone proper treatment and thereby aggravate the problem. In the case of diarrhoea, drugs such as Lomotil or Imodium may staunch the flow – and enable you to catch a plane – but fail to effect a proper cure.

Most stomach disorders can be avoided by staying away from suspect ice, drinking only bottle or boiled fluids (but plentifully) and sticking to hot, freshly prepared dishes. Items worth avoiding are lepid curries of indeterminate antiquity, cold dishes (especially if they have been left out in the sun), fussy items that have clearly involved a lot of manual preparation, raw or undercooked meats, fish and poultry, and shellfish (particularly crab). Anyone wishing to experience a living death can take their chances with imported oysters – not hard given the number of luxury hotels that insist on offering seafood buffets all year round.

These dietary precautions should also guard against most parasites. Avoidance of close personal contact affords the best protection against lice and mites, while the wearing of shoes at all times is recommended against hook worms.

The great dread disease of the late 20th century, AIDS, has of course finally found its way to Asia, and shows every sign of becoming a major



Reporting on Bangkok's floods has its own inherent dangers.

killer in the 1990s. Even China, which has mounted a Draconian effort to keep the disease out, has recently begun detecting its insidious advance, principally among intravenous drug users along the Yunnan border north of the Golden Triangle formed by Laos, Burma and Thailand.

The latter, by one relatively conservative estimate, this year has an HIV-positive population of 250,000. The disease is likely to have leached across porous frontiers with Laos, Cambodia and Burma, and probably to a lesser degree into Malaysia and Singapore via the hundreds of thousands who each year gallivant up to the raucous Thai border. A disturbing

number of Burmese fishermen have also tested HIV positive. Like Pakistan, closeted Burma is meanwhile threatened by an intravenous drug population larger than it either knows or would be prepared to recognise.

Burma and a number of other less developed Asian countries have the added problem of a poorly equipped medical community far too willing to resort to palliative use of syringes intended to delude gullible patients that some specious cure for their ills has been attempted. The problem also hangs like a Sword of Damocles over Soviet Central Asia, which is scourged by ungoverned recycling of syringes.



Are you sure this is going to do me some good?

For the sexually continent, non-drug abusing business traveller, AIDS and other less lethal venereal diseases obviously pose negligible threat. Poor standards of hygiene in provincial hospitals, clinics and dentists may, however, provide transmission routes for AIDS and other disease. Satisfactory standards of blood screening are also only applied in the more developed parts of Asia, which makes emergency evacuation a highly recommended component in any medical insurance policy the business traveller may select.

"With regard to the more usual forms of venereal disease, there are regrettably many business travellers who once they are overseas on the loose get ideas in their heads and seem to feel that because they are visiting developing countries they are arriving before venereal diseases have developed there. This, as we all know, is so wrong, and far worse than that there is a far higher percentage of antibiotic-resistant strains because of far less control of the sale of antibiotics." These observations appeared in Dr. Anthony Turner's *Travel Medicine - A Handbook for Practitioners*, first published in 1975, and they still apply.

Although it is subject to debate, some doctors contend that even some of the perfectly respectable traditional massages offered in Southeast Asia can occasionally prove perilous. Doctors in Bangkok have reported cases of patients who have had their toes or fingers pulled until they "click", only to be left with dislocated digits.

Massages that involve walking barefoot along the client's spine can also be hazardous. "The author has seen at least one elderly visitor who had to be carried out of a massage parlour on a stretcher having suffered an acute herniated intervertebral disc as a result of this treatment," reports the useful *Guide to Healthy Living in Thailand* produced by the Thai Red Cross in conjunction with the US Embassy's Regional Medical Centre in Bangkok.

Something else definitely worth avoiding is neck cricking, a "service" offered routinely by many barbers in the region. The procedure (which in Rambo films invariably dispatches the victim permanently) involves sudden lateral twists in both directions. This might not be your final "click", but it could result in an agonising cervical spine dislocation. Barbers also offer ear-cleaning serv-

ices that can cause infections or, worse, perforate ear drums.

Ear and upper respiratory system infections are frequently contracted in swimming pools. Beaches meanwhile threaten the problem of sunburn plus, to an increasing degree, serious pollution. This has made swimming a definite health hazard in many of the larger resorts.

Advice should always be sought from knowledgeable locals on the hazards in different areas—for example sharks, jellyfish, stonefish and sea snakes. Inexperienced snorkellers should also remember that coral abrasions can lead to severe infections and should receive prompt medical attention.

Travellers can do much to help themselves by such simple expedients as moderating alcohol consumption, setting work schedules that are realistic given climate and other environmental conditions, and washing their hands. They can also learn from common Asian practices such as bowing, drinking tea and frequent washing. These may be primarily cultural manifestations, but they also have much to recommend them in terms of simple hygiene. Eating with chopsticks from a shared plate does not. But then again, shaking hands can convey conjunctivitis.

Business travellers who become unwell after returning from a trip should seek immediate medical attention. The doctor should always be informed of the patient's recent movements so that he can make a referral to a specialist if an illness beyond his normal scope of experience is suspected.

But even knowing the patient's recent whereabouts might not always be enough. There was the freak case some years ago of a British publican who contracted malaria without ever leaving England. He worked near one of the world's busiest international airports and was evidently the victim of a mosquito stowaway brought in by one of his customers. This might be worth remembering next time you arrive in Australia and feel indignant at being decontaminated with insecticide before leaving the aircraft. Bugs away? □

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Sowing Discord Within The FCCT

It is rare that the FCCT's correspondent membership makes the headlines of a Southeast Asian publication. What follows is a remarkable specimen of anti-press propaganda extracted (with original spellings and grammar) from the June 4, 1991, issue of the Burmese military's gun-metal mouth-piece, the Working People's Daily. Entitled The Fabrications of the cheap mercenary correspondents from Bangkok, this collector's item was signed with the nomme de guerre Nyan Khiet and followed by a four-part diatribe against several prominent club members entitled Ethics and Journalism: Interpretations of media morality. It is truly a pity that space does not allow printing this as well, but a priceless excerpt of it appears at the end of this reprint.

We ask only this: is it the fiendish Bangkok press corps that is trying so hard with their "poison pens" to sow the inscrutable seeds of discord between the Burmese population and their beloved olive-drab leaders, or is it the junta engaged in just another clever ruse to drive a wedge through the ranks of our sacred club?

— Michael Shari

Bangkok has been the haunt of the cheap mercenary correspondents engaged in the business of selling international news since the beginning of the Vietnam War. During the Vietnam War the South East Asian region was the source of all kinds of news connected with the Vietnam War. It particularly was the haunt of hard-up correspondents who were out to sell all sorts of news to the news market in the United States. It became a place to which cheap and inexperienced correspondents whom nobody in Europe and the United States used flocked in order to earn a living and to begin their newspaper career. The South East Asian region indeed became a place which provided them ample opportunity and conditions to exploit such as gathering all sorts of news about the Vietnam War and the opium business, churning them out into saleable copies through exaggeration and imagination and sell them to earn their livelihood.

The Indo-China War and the business of trafficking narcotic drugs which grew and gained momentum as a result of the war were inexhaustible sources of news items for the mercenary newsmen who exaggerated, twisted and even re-created them for their own benefit. After the conclusion of the Indo-China War those newsmen looked for new opportunities and continued to earn their living there. They also sought shortcuts to fame in the world of newspapers by conferring on themselves titles such as "experts on Indo-China", "experts on South East Asia" and "experts on narcotic drugs business". They looked for new 'grazing grounds' and new opportunities and employed various means to make ignorant persons think highly of them. So, it is not surprising that such cheap correspondents exploited the disturbances in Myanmar Naing-Ngan for their own interests and benefits. The disturbances that took

place in Myanmar Naing-Ngan were the 'opportunities' which they had been longing for and seeking. It was sort of their getting an opportunity to make a lot of money by investing a little. It was something like their having got a job which they did according to their motto "the more you lie to and deceive others, the more famous you become."

During the disturbances in Myanmar Naing-Ngan some Bangkok-based newsmen wrote news items from the one-sided and destructive point of view on the basis of the news they received from those who opposed the Myanmar Government but after the newsmen had got the opportunity of visiting Myanmar Naing-Ngan, studying things themselves and writing news items thanks to the State Law and Order Restoration Council Information Committee's systematic implementation of the programme of releasing correct and authentic news, writing on the basis of one-sided views and opinions against Myanmar Naing-Ngan markedly declined. It is found that only one Bangkok-based freelance correspondent and some correspondents representing the BBC have constantly been writing false and fabricated news and one-sided comments attacking the State. They have tried by their writings, to make the leaders of the State thought of as murderers and robbers and to sow misunderstanding and discord between the Tatmadaw and the people. The number of correspondents who have been writing this way is very small. They are none other than Bangkok-based free-lance correspondent Bertil Lintner and correspondent Christopher Guinness of the BBC.

Bertil Lintner had been writing about Myanmar Naing-Ngan on the basis of one-sided views long before the disturbances took place. He could not bear to see Myanmar Naing-Ngan implementing its own pro-

gramme of relying on its own strength and he wrote about Myanmar Naing-Ngan from the point of view of getting it turned into a public rest-house kind of nation into which anybody could come without any restrictions. He has a negative attitude towards and a prejudiced view of the nation-building work of the Government and the national defence work of the Tatmadaw and he has advocated the so-called cause of the indigenous insurgents and their desires. He has always written in favour of the insurgents giving false and fabricated news of and one-sided comments on Myanmar Naing-Ngan on the basis of the insurgents' pessimistic point of view. He has always served the interests of the insurgents. Bertil Lintner is a correspondent who has always slandered and attacked the socialist system but who has never written anything bad and evil about the Burma Communist Party. He has never studied Myanmar Naing-Ngan's economic system of ensuring self-sufficiency and has not written about it; instead, he has written about the black market business on the basis of hearsay and from one-sided point of view putting the blame on the Government.

Bertil Lintner has written news items and articles in such a way as to make the people misunderstand the leaders of the State and to lower the dignity of the leaders in the eyes of the people but he has, in his writings, cleverly depicted the insurgent leaders as if they were real revolutionaries. In other words, he has never written about the State, the Government, the socialist system, the Tatmadaw and the leaders of the State from correct and balanced points of view; instead he has, with grudge and malice, depicted them as his enemies. Thus, his writings have revealed his inherent malice, grudge, prejudice and enmity towards Myanmar Naing-Ngan and its leaders.

*** Poison pen

Having entered Myanmar illegally via the backdoor and having stayed in the jungles long enough to

know the lay of the land thoroughly, it is only natural that Bert is able to employ clever ruses in his personal assertions to lend them a semblance of authenticity.

When the Tatmadaw had managed to crush the BCP, Bert asserted that thousands of the ex-BCP forces had "returned to their home villages, providing additional labour for the poppy fields".

Given the record of his having filed anti-establishment reports even before the events of 1988, Bert has become more adept with his poison pen, taking a swipe at our leaders and the good work they are doing on the flimsiest excuse.

Bertil Lintner runs a rumour mill sans morality.

*** Wedge

Bertil asserted that "near-collapse of the country's manufacturers" had been caused by having been flooded with "cheap Chinese consumer goods that have swamped local producers" in the wake of the 1988 China-Myanmar cross-border trade deal.

That was perhaps a veiled attempt at driving a wedge between the Chinese suppliers and the Myanmar consumers. Flood or no, consumers here had an abundance of goods to choose from.

Bertil, the way those who read between the lines see it here, is an ill wind that blows nobody good.

Often enough, the SLORC has reminded Bertil and the like-minded to stop interfering in our internal affairs and to behave like journalists worthy of their calling.

*** Avowed aim

Journalism, is a strange game. Instead of giving the news dead-pan and features fairly and accurately, the pen can be used to assail and assault others. Be that as it may, the SLORC, the Tatmadaw, will faithfully adhere to Our Three Causes namely, Non-disintegration of the Union, Non-disintegration of Unity and Perpetuation of National Sovereignty, while getting other tasks implemented. The SLORC will proceed with its avowed aim, unhindered. □

"Open letter to Bertil Lintner"



A Silom Cocktail, Anyone?

Mary Kay Magistad tells you just what you've been trying not to think about – what's in the air that swirls around your car on the way to the Dusit Thani. (First printed in The Washington Post in April.)

each day from the 2 million vehicles on Bangkok's clogged streets, according to studies done by Bangkok's Mahidol University. Public Health Dean Dr. Debhanom Muangman says at least 18 of these – including benzopyrene and ammonium sulfate – can cause cancer.

Much of the problem comes from the low-grade leaded gasoline that is used in Thailand. It's cheap, but environmental experts such as Dr. Debhanom warn that it may be causing many of Bangkok's 6.5 million residents and workers to breathe themselves into early graves.

Lung cancer is three times higher in Bangkok than in Thailand's provinces, and almost one million Bangkok residents received treatment last year for respiratory infections, said Dr. Sangsant Panich, former chief of the National Environment Board's air and noise pollution department.

"We have plenty of regulations on the books to control pollution, but we don't have good enforcement," Dr. Sangsant said.

Thailand's interim government, installed by the military after a bloodless coup on February 23, has taken some steps to reduce pollution-related health risks by encouraging use of low-lead and unleaded gasoline.

The move comes none too soon. Fatigue, headaches and, ultimately, chromosome disorders and permanent brain damage can result from high lead levels. In the United States, a level of 25 micrograms per deciliter of blood is considered dangerous for adults, and five is hazardous for children. But Bangkok's hospitals shrug off a level of 35 – the average for long-term Bangkok residents – as "acceptable."

At Siriraj Hospital, doctors have tested dozens of newborn babies and found lead levels as high as 10 to 25. They had been poisoned through their mothers' umbilical cords, as their mothers breathed in Bangkok's filthy air.

"A newborn baby should have a lead level of zero – anything more than that is abnormal," said Dr. Luaporn Boonakan, who coordinates this research. "But we're finding average lead levels of 15. This could slow nervous system development, or result in brain damage in the child. We're already finding school children with high lead levels to have lower I.Q.s, poor concentration skills and aggressive behaviour."

Sometimes, the emotional effects of traffic pollution are almost as dramatic. More than 1 million Thais were also treated for nervous disorders and anxieties last year. Doctors said many complained about the strain of spending hours each day in Bangkok traffic, which is anarchic when it isn't gridlocked.

"Even though I don't have to be at work until 9 a.m., I leave my house at 6," said Sutin Wannabavorn, a Reuters reporter who lives about eight miles from his office. "If I left even an hour later, I wouldn't get to work on time. And I don't try going back home until after 8 p.m., because until then the highway is the world's longest parking lot."

The average speed of travel through Bangkok, at any time of day or night, is now less than 5 miles per hour, Sangsant said. If drastic steps aren't taken immediately to provide better public transportation and reduce the number of cars on the roads, he says, that average will drop by half in five years.

"You'd be better off walking,



New Petchburi Road at rush hour (photo by Mary Kay Magistad)

except you wouldn't be able to breathe," Sangsant said.

Noise pollution from the nearly gridlocked traffic causes still more problems. Dr. Debhanom said he'd tested noise levels on Bangkok's streets and found them soaring past 100 decibels at rush hour. He said being subjected to this for more than one hour can destroy the inner ear. He said preliminary tests on traffic police had revealed varying losses of hearing.

Even the dogs in Bangkok seem to have lost their hearing because of the noise in city streets. "I bought a high-pitched alarm while I was visiting the United States, to scare away stray dogs," Dr. Debhanom said. "In the States, when I turned it on, dogs whimpered and ran away. Here in Bangkok, the dogs just wag their tails and come straight towards me. They can't hear a thing."

Reducing the health risks for Bangkok residents—including excessive noise pollution and overcrowding—has involved byzantine politi-

cal infighting. Even the task of awarding a contract for a desperately needed mass transit system has taken more than a decade. Canada's Lavalin Company won out in a fierce bidding war, which, Thai press reports allege, involved steep bribes.

Even that offers little hope of relief, some urban planning specialists say. Charles Setchell, a Fulbright researcher studying urban development in Bangkok, recently wrote that even if all the mass transit plans go ahead on schedule, at a cost of up to \$14 billion over 15 years, average vehicle speed will only pick up by about half a mile per hour.

This is because of the huge number of new private vehicles nudging out onto the streets every month—26,400 in January alone—and the Greater Bangkok area's rapidly growing population, expected to increase by one-third within 15 years.

Bangkok's growing pains are not all traffic-related. High fecal content in its rivers and canals have

rendered many former sources of drinking water unpotable. Even with annual double-digit economic growth over the last three years, the Government still has not invested in a domestic waste treatment and disposal system for its capital city. Only 2 per cent of Bangkok's 8 million residents have their own sewer system, according to National Environment Board statistics.

"There's a stretch of three or four miles along the Chao Phya River where there's almost no oxygen and almost no fish or any other living thing left," said Sunthad Somchevit, Deputy Secretary General of the National Environment Board. "When I was growing up in Bangkok, the canals and all the big trees along them were so beautiful. Now, it's a different world." □

CLUB NEWS

The seamy world of Bangkok's foreign hackery was suffering from post-Kuwait depression over the summer, with desert veterans musing nostalgically over their beers and frothy memories of Stormin' press conferences.

Thailand has proved relatively peaceful since the military took matters into their own hands in February, and the new interim Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun was able to put up a strong defence of the latest twist in the Kingdom's politics when he addressed the FCCT at a special dinner in April. **Mary Kay Magistad** of the Boston Globe brought the house down with a question about investigating unusually wealthy military officers. But Mr. Anand did not flinch, and deftly got off the hook by asking who was about to issue a complaint.

Erskine "Pitbull" McCullough wrote a savage feature on one of the most beloved of the military officers in Burma, intelligence chief Major General Khin Nyunt. With predictable Celtic overstatement, McCullough branded Khin Nyunt, one of the most beloved of the Burmese junta who only ordered the shooting of students out of the goodness of their hearts, as the "Prince of Death". The sobriquet caused some high-level indigestion in Rangoon, and several weeks later a rebuttal, longer than the original article, appeared in the letters column of the Bangkok Post. It appears that references to the alleged effeminate nature of the spy boss hit a soft point somewhere. "Pitbull" McCullough is now understood to be contemplating a piece on Pol Pot—the Pansy of Phnom Penh. The AFP story also resulted in a fierce broadside from one of Asia's most respected journals, the Working People's Daily in Rangoon, against Burmese scholar **Bertil Lintner**, who was suspected of providing some of

the background material on Khin Nyunt. "The barking dog" of the Bangkok press establishment was the title Lintner earned from his Burmese journalist counterparts in Asia's most dynamic capital.

A number of the press corps are bailing out, as the chaotic living conditions in Bangkok crack nerves and reduce grown men to Valium. **Michael Shari** is Tokyo-bound where he will be chronicling the Japanese economic Leviathan. And after seven years of pounding the keys in Singapore and Bangkok, **Helen White** is turning her back on the ignoble profession for a year in academia in a university in Michigan. **Boris Chekhonin**, the Tass veteran, is retiring to Moscow—on an official pension of \$8 per month, which won't buy him very much perestroika, as he ruefully points out.

Jeremy Wagstaff, the dashing Reuters correspondent with a quick wit and an enormous tape collection—contraband—is now ensconced in Hong Kong, where he spends his days avoiding interview requests from celebrity magazines while covering the territory's final slide back into the embrace of the Middle Kingdom. As number two man on the Hong Kong local desk, Jeremy also has to explain that Reuters does not give out visas to that rainy European country which can't get out of the island territory fast enough. At Reuters in Bangkok, his place has been taken by **David Brunstrom**, the man who yearned to give up his holidays to spend a week outside Aung San Suu Kyi's house in Rangoon listening to the strains of Mozart, until she sold the piano.

In June, the placid life of Bangkok-based correspondents was interrupted by the simultaneous events of Vietnam's seventh party congress and another round of Cambodian peace talks, to be held in Pattaya. Neither occasion promised to be

much fun, so many hacks opted for Hanoi, where at least tourists are scarce and silk shirts still sell for \$7 at Khai's north of Hoan Kiem lake. **Paul Wedel**, **Nick Cummings**, **Bruce**, **Louise Williams**, **Mary Kay Magistad** and the new New York Times correspondent, **Philip Shenon**, all turned up to wade through hours of the communist party's internal political debates—at least one case of insomnia is reported to have been cured.

But meanwhile in Thailand's premier health resort, Pattaya-on-sea, the Cambodians fell victim to Prince Sihanouk's charm and copious quantities of champagne, and staggered away after three days with an agreement to be nice to each other for ever more. By design or default, many of the old Cambodia hands happened to be present—**Charles Antoine de Nerciat** of AFP mused about the roots of Cambodian royalty, **Jacques Bekaert** held furtive corridor conversations with everybody down to the hotel cleaning staff, **Nate Thayer** got final approval from the Phnom Penh delegates to enter their country with a visa, and **James Pringle** wrote a letter to Sihanouk to ask to accompany the Ultimate Prince on the plane back to Phnom Penh, planned for November. Meanwhile Mickey, a four-legged bundle of white fluff known to all Cambodia aficionados, nearly bit **Kevin Cooney** in the ankle for trying to eavesdrop an apparently endless lunch hosted by his Ultimate.

In Phnom Penh, **Tiziano Terzani** of Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine had lined up an interview with Prime Minister Hun Sen on his return from Pattaya until an urgent cable from Germany forced the tireless Italian to fly to Manila to inhale some volcanic dust and work on a story about global pollution, Pinoy style. □

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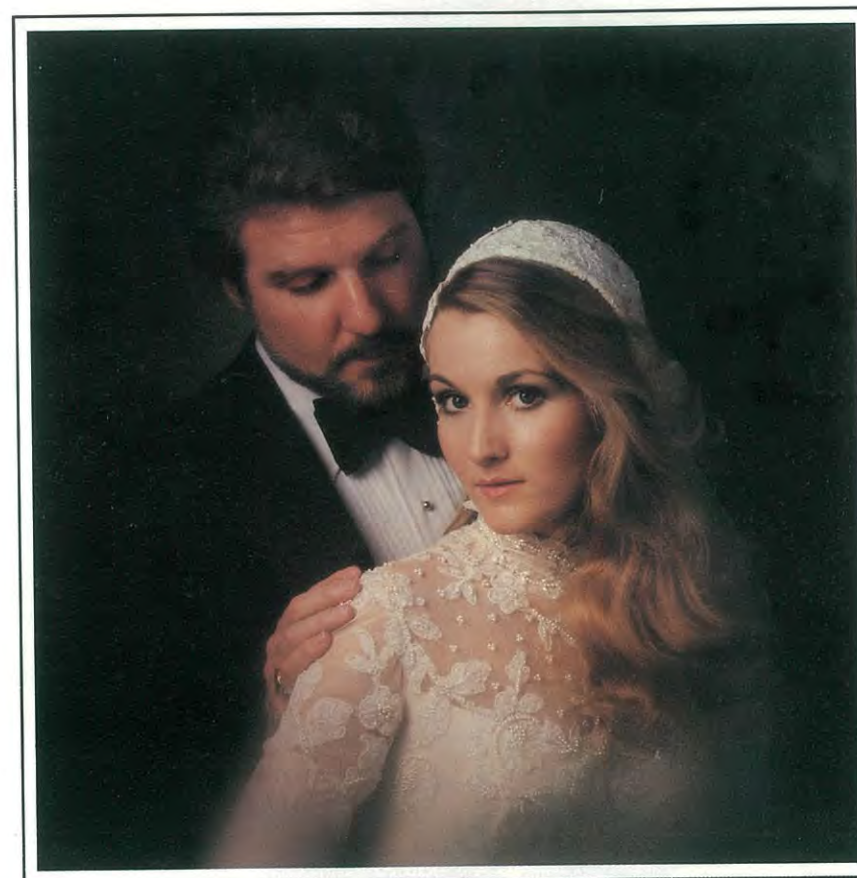


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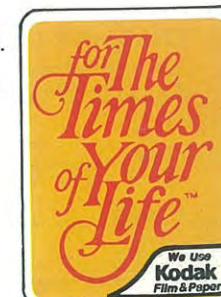
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