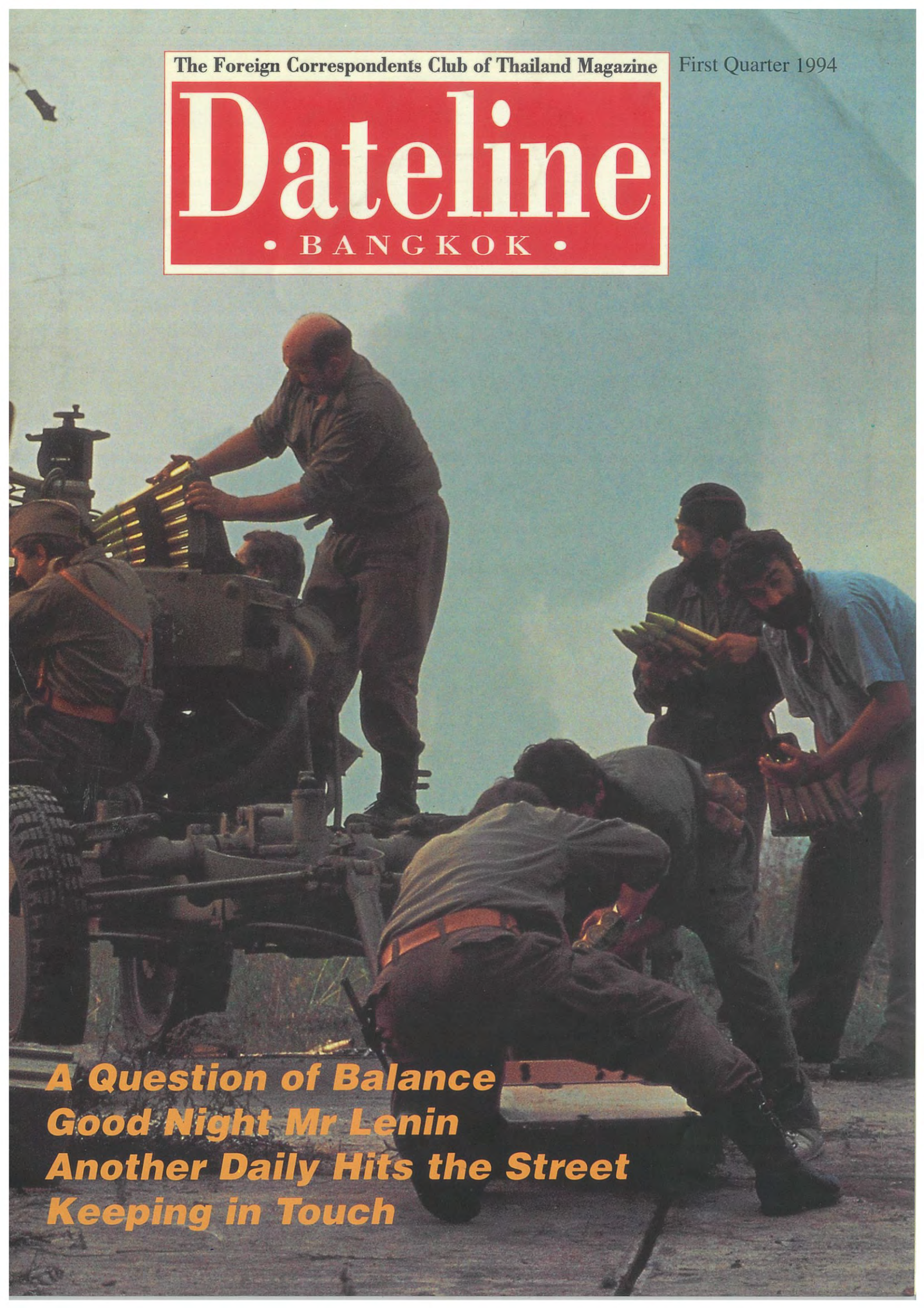


The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine

First Quarter 1994

Dateline

• B A N G K O K •



***A Question of Balance
Good Night Mr Lenin
Another Daily Hits the Street
Keeping in Touch***



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CONTRIBUTORS

Dateline Bangkok, the FCCT's quarterly magazine, welcomes story or photo essay contributions from our journalist and associate members. Please contact Imtiaz Muqbil at 255-1480, 253-7590 Payment is in FCCT chit books.

FRONT COVER Good Night, Mr Lenin

A Letter From Your President

By Bertil Lintner



Me in the Salvation Army Red Shield Guest House, Calcutta, October 1975

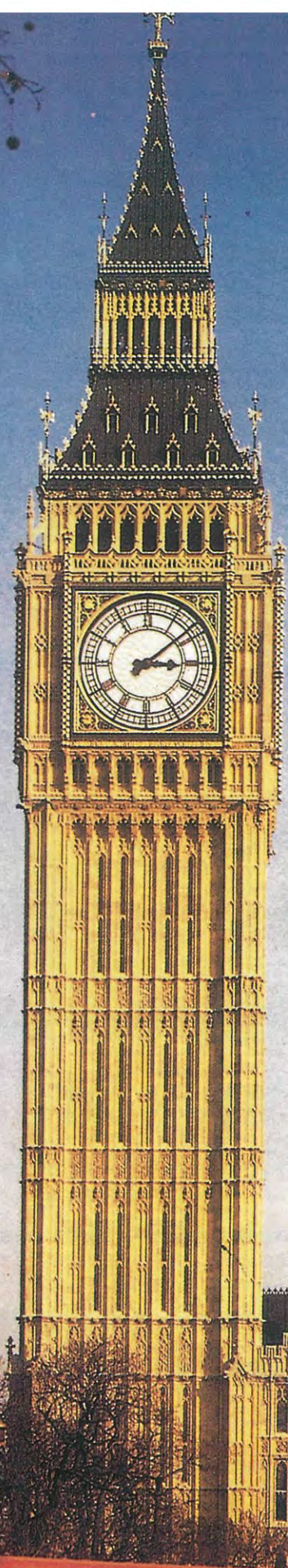
the Malaysia Hotel in Bangkok, detoured via Borneo to Indonesia and hitch-hiked across Australia, from Perth to Sydney. It was at that time I decided to become a journalist. My daily journal became the basis for a

An Indian weekly once described Calcutta as more a state of mind than a city: "It epitomises all that is magnificent and all that is squalid about urban India, its people, its theatres, its coffee-houses and its bookshops set against some of the most depressing slums, the most wretched pavement hovels, the most noxious pollution, the most irreparable decay in the world. It seems a city without hope, a soot-and-concrete wasteland of power-cuts, pot-holes and poverty; yet it inspires some of the country's greatest creative talents. To the true Calcuttan, there is no other city quite like it; if one tires of Calcutta one tires of life."

The city also inspired a 22-year old boy from clean, sheltered Sweden to become a writer. I stayed in my dormitory at the Salvation Army Red Shield Guest House on Sudder Road for 8 rupees a night, bed and breakfast. I had three bouts of severe dysentery and lost more than 20 kilograms. But I gathered whatever strength I had left and went to see Major D J Gardiner, a former British Army officer who had shifted to the Salvation Army and ran a feed-

I am never quite sure what to answer when people in Asia ask me where I studied journalism, what courses I attended and what university I went to. In Asia, it is taken for granted that young people have to struggle to get college and university degrees to prove that they know what they are supposed to know. Feebly, I usually try to explain that I never went to university, apart from a short stint at Classical Greek in Uppsala. I left my native Sweden at age 22 in June 1975 carrying a pack on my back and with a monthly budget of US\$100. I had decided to travel overland through Asia down to New Zealand. Six months later, I reached Wellington. I had taken buses through the deserts of Afghanistan, crossed the Indian Subcontinent by train, stayed at

series of articles which I sent off to a local newspaper in my hometown in Sweden. One of the first stories I ever did was about Calcutta. I was fascinated by that vibrant city from the moment I arrived. The city resembled a weird mix of East London after a World War Two air raid and Lancashire at the time of the industrial revolution. There were high factory walls, smoking chimneys and cobbled streets teeming with humanity. Not even the old, imperial buildings in the city centre seemed to escape the effect of the press of people around them; they were crumbling to rubble ringed with human excreta and makeshift shelters raised by the thousands of pavement dwellers who were resolutely squatting in their once spacious colonnades.



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ing program in Calcutta's slums. Every day, his minitrucks picked up leftovers from the canteens in central Calcutta's office blocks, and then distributed the food in the shanty towns.

He was an impressive character, and I rather preposterously introduced myself as a "freelance journalist from Sweden". He was proud to show me his work and I took copious notes. The story was never published. Instead, my local Swedish newspaper settled for an account of how I had hitch-hiked through the Khyber Pass, and a colourful piece about the holy city of Benares. But if there was any doubt about my credentials, I now had articles in print to prove that I was indeed a journalist.

I spent another five years on

the road from Istanbul to Bangkok, from Tokyo to Denpasar, before I settled in Thailand in early 1980. My university had been the Frontier Mail in Pakistan, the Hyderabad Express, the slums of Calcutta, the jungles of Burma and the wilderness of Borneo - and today I want to share this experience with other people who are dreaming of becoming journalists. It's your experience rather than your formal education that makes you a good, investigative reporter. This is not to say that formal education is meaningless, but in order to become a truly crazy journalist, it's your own life that matters the most - and in order to become a good journalist, you have to be a bit crazy, or as the classic American foreign correspondent H R Knickerbocker put it: "Whenever you find hundreds

of thousands of sane people trying to get out of a place and a little bunch of madmen struggling to get in, you know that the latter are newspapermen."

Thank God we have the FCCT to retreat to. Our clubhouse may not be perfect, the food isn't all that great and it's certainly not cheap. But where else in Bangkok can you relax in the company of good friends? Our friendly staff, our Monday film nights, Wednesday night programs, cheap drinks on Fridays and documentaries on Saturdays all make us a unique club. Join us, and help us make the FCCT an even better club for madmen like myself as well as for associate members who want a hassle-free place to go for a beer and a chat.



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Club Highlights



The 1994 FCCT executive committee: Back row: Patrick Lescot, Dominic Faulder, Victor Mallet, Philippe Decaux, Bertil Lintner, Imtiaz Muqbil, Doug Logan; front: Margo Towie, Hasan Basar, Sonya Hepinstall, Pam Hongsakul (missing Whitney Small and Michelle Cooper).



Bertil Lintner briefs incoming correspondent Director of membership, Patrick Lescot

A mix of new and old faces makes up the 1994 FCCT executive committee, elected at the Annual General Meeting on 28 January.

Bertil Lintner resumes the presidency for a second year with the aim of fulfilling the pledge he made when moving into the position last year to relocate the club. Bertil was born in 1953 in Sweden of mixed Swedish-Austrian parentage. He came to Asia by the overland route in 1975, spending

five years travelling in the East financed by income from odd jobs in Sweden, New Zealand, Hong Kong and

Japan, before settling down in Thailand in 1980. Bertil now covers Burma - and the Golden Triangle - for the Far Eastern Economic Review. He is the author of four books about Burma - *Outrage: Burma's Struggle for Democracy*; *Land of Jade: A Journey Through Insurgent Burma*; *The Rise and Fall of The Communist Party of Burma*; and *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948*. Bertil's wife, Hseng Noun, is Shan from Burma and their 8-year-old daughter Hseng Tai loves the FCCT pool table.

New to the committee but a well-known face at the club is Philippe Decaux, taking on the role of 1st vice president with the responsibility of overseeing the club's finances. Philippe has been resident in Thailand since 1984, working as a producer and cameraman for various European networks. He has covered Asia since 1974 and specialises in strange off-road trips to Cambodia and other countries in the region to get material for documentaries. Philippe's permanent concern in life is the study and use of new gadgetry and the permanent upgrading of his 4WD truck, named The Flying Jeep by FEER correspondent

John McBeth at the Cambodian border during an offensive in 1984.

Stepping into the 2nd vice president slot, with the task of overseeing programs, is Margo Towie. Margo, who put out *Dateline Bangkok* last year as correspondent director of publicity, moved to Bangkok early in 1991 as accredited South-east Asia correspondent for the Australian news and current affairs magazine *The Bulletin* and, later, Melbourne-based *Business Review Weekly*. Her relocation, fulfilling a personal ambition to be based in Asia, followed four years as staff writer for *The Australian* newspaper covering technology, finance, general news and as political correspondent for the state of Victoria. Margo, born in Australia in 1958, moved into radio and print journalism in pursuit of cash while completing a degree in literature, sociology and politics as a mature age student in 1982. The job soon took over and she edited several high profile trade papers before joining *The Australian*.

Immediate past president Dominic Faulder, 35, took up the position vacated when 1992 president Tan Lian Choo re-



In case you weren't sure

turned to Singapore with the *Straits Times* late last year. Dominic is a British freelance photojournalist who has been based in Bangkok since the early 1980s. His articles and photographs have appeared in an extremely wide range of publications in Asia, Europe, the US and Australia. They principally relate to Thailand and Burma, although he has also been active in Cambodia and more recently Vietnam. Dominic is a long-standing contributor to the Hong Kong newsweekly *Asiaweek* and occasionally provides radio commentaries and reports. Dominic was second vice-president of the FCCT in 1989 and president in 1990 and 1991. As immediate past president, he chaired the professional committee in 1992 and has reassumed the position in 1994. Along with another FCCT past president,



Kim Wiesener and Christer Nilsson

Denis Gray, Dominic is co-president of the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation. He is married to Caroline and they have two children, Patrick and Catherine.

Taking up the cudgel as correspondent director for membership

is Patrick Lescot, 41, a Frenchman born in Tunisia. Patrick has been an AFP reporter since 1982. He started his career with French TV and several French newspapers before joining the wire service in South Africa. After



The lads

returning to Paris to work on the foreign desk, Patrick completed Chinese studies at the School of Far Eastern Languages and Civilisations before being sent to AFP's Beijing bureau in 1986. There he covered the Tibet uprising and the Tian An Men tragedy. Patrick returned to Paris in 1990, where his assignments included coverage of the war in former Yugoslavia from Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo. He was appointed to AFP's Bangkok bureau in March 1993. Patrick has a 14-year old son, a

degree in philosophy and journalism and speaks fluent Spanish.

Victor Mallet, South-east Asia correspondent for the Financial Times continues on as corresponding secretary. Born on 14 May, 1960, Victor was educated in England. Realising he had no qualifications other than a degree in English literature, he became a journalist. Victor was trained by Reuters news agency in London and Paris and went on to cover South Africa's upheavals from 1983 to 1986. He then moved to Lusaka to cover Africa for the Financial Times. Thereafter, he became Middle East correspondent and covered the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War. He moved to Bangkok in 1992.

Sonya Hepinstall takes on the position of correspondent director of programs after moving onto the board last year as recording secretary. A correspondent with Reuters news agency, Sonya relocated to Bangkok as second in charge of the agency more than a year ago from Hong Kong on a three-year posting with responsibility for covering Thailand, Laos, Burma and Cambodia. She and husband Steve have a cat, Jaffe.

Moving onto the board as correspondent director of publicity is Imtiaz Muqbil, a resident of Thailand since 1978. A graduate of the London School of Journalism, Imtiaz worked in Kuwait for Newsweek and McGraw-Hill World News be-



Sonya Hepinstall

fore moving to Thailand as a staff writer and sub-editor for the Bangkok Post. Since 1982, Imtiaz has covered Asia-Pacific travel and tourism, an industry that he says encapsulates all the social, ecological and economic changes taking place in the region. The author of two books and several major studies on Thai tourism, Imtiaz writes a weekly column in the Bangkok Post and edits TRAX, a magazine on the Thai hotel industry.

A new face on the board and in Bangkok is recording secretary Michelle Cooper, 48, an American working with AFP for 20 years since starting as an editor on the English desk in Paris. As AFP's English wires grew, Michelle was named deputy head in 1979 and then head of English language services in 1983. Assignments included a lengthy stint in Hong Kong in 1982 when AFP was expanding its editorial operations around the world, five years as bureau chief based in Singapore and two as Washington bureau chief. Before taking up the job of Bangkok bureau chief in November, Michelle spent three months in London studying Chinese art history, a special

interest, and then completed a five-month special assignment at AFP's Paris headquarters.

This is the third year as FCCT treasurer for Doug Logan, who points out that the previous average tenure was six months. Doug, an American, has been in Bangkok since 1990 as managing director of Lippo Asia (Thailand) Ltd and regional representative for the PT Lippo Bangkok representative office. An avid golfer, Doug has worked in Asia since 1980.

Associate director of publicity Hasan Basar continues in the job for a second year. Born in Thailand and of Turkish origin, Hasan was educated at Oxford University where he earned a Master's Degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics. Executive Director of Presko Ltd, Hasan speaks Thai, Turkish and German. He joined Presko as a partner in 1981 and, during more than 12 years with the firm, has been responsible for a broad range of client portfolios and has an active role in business development. Hasan serves on the Council of the Siam Society and is the secretary of His Majesty the King's scholarships to Oxford University. He also serves on the board of the Chulalongkorn University Fund for the Promotion of Environmental Education and is a trustee of the Elephant and Forest Conservation Fund of Thailand. In 1990, he was appointed Turkey's Honorary

Trade Representative in Thailand.

Associate director of membership, Whitney Small, also continues on for a second year. Whitney is managing director of Burson Marsteller (Thailand). Her areas of speciality include product and service promotions, events marketing and environmental communications for a variety of industries. Prior to joining Burson-Marsteller, Whitney was general manager of a regional communications company in Taipei, where she was heavily involved in consumer products and the banking and travel industries. Whitney holds a degree in International Relations and Economics from the University of Minnesota. She studied Mandarin at Nankai University in Tianjin, China, and worked in both Taiwan and Hong Kong before joining Burson Marsteller in Bangkok. Fluent in Mandarin, Whitney spends her free time studying Thai and playing squash.

New to the board but well known to many club members is associate director of programs, Pam Hongtrakul. Educated in the United States, Pam came to Bangkok three years ago and has worked in marketing and media. Special events she has worked on include project manager of the Asian Open Snooker 1992 and also the Tchaikovsky 100th Anniversary Celebration

featuring the Byelorussian Symphony Orchestra.

Committees were formed at the AGM to help executive members formulate programs, events and activities that strengthen the FCCT. Members who were not present at the AGM are urged to contact executive members if they would like to participate. Most committees convene on a monthly basis so the commitment is not



Dominic Faulder, Christine Cuff, Bertil Lintner

onerous. Running a club like the FCCT is not difficult with input - but with none it becomes burdensome. Members with ideas for programs, events, activities or access to sponsors who might support particular functions are asked to share these thoughts with the executive committee.

Appreciation for their past effort goes to those who stepped down from the executive committee this year: Huangjee Sai-Chia, who as 1993 first vice president secured unprecedented support from the Chinese, Taiwanese and Japanese communities in Thailand; Panadda Lertlum-Ampai, who served in

many positions for several years before stepping down as second vice president. Panadda worked tirelessly over the past few years to deliver vibrant and interesting Wednesday night programs. Paul Handley, 1993 correspondent director of programs, stepped aside to pursue personal interests but promises continued input to the programming sub-committee and in the search for new premises. Former correspondent director of membership, Lee Miller, stepped down from the board after a year and a half while 1993 associate director of programs Teeranat Karnjanauksorn found work commitments too heavy to see out the year-long post. Without their input, 1993 would not have been such a good year for the FCCT.

Looking ahead, the 1994 board promises to keep up the standard of programs while increasing the number of member activities. Dateline Bangkok promises to be even more focussed to the interests of its members while the problem of declining correspondent and associate membership will be addressed. Most importantly, efforts will become even more focussed on the need to relocate the club in premises that are safe, convenient and large enough to allow more than one activity at a time.

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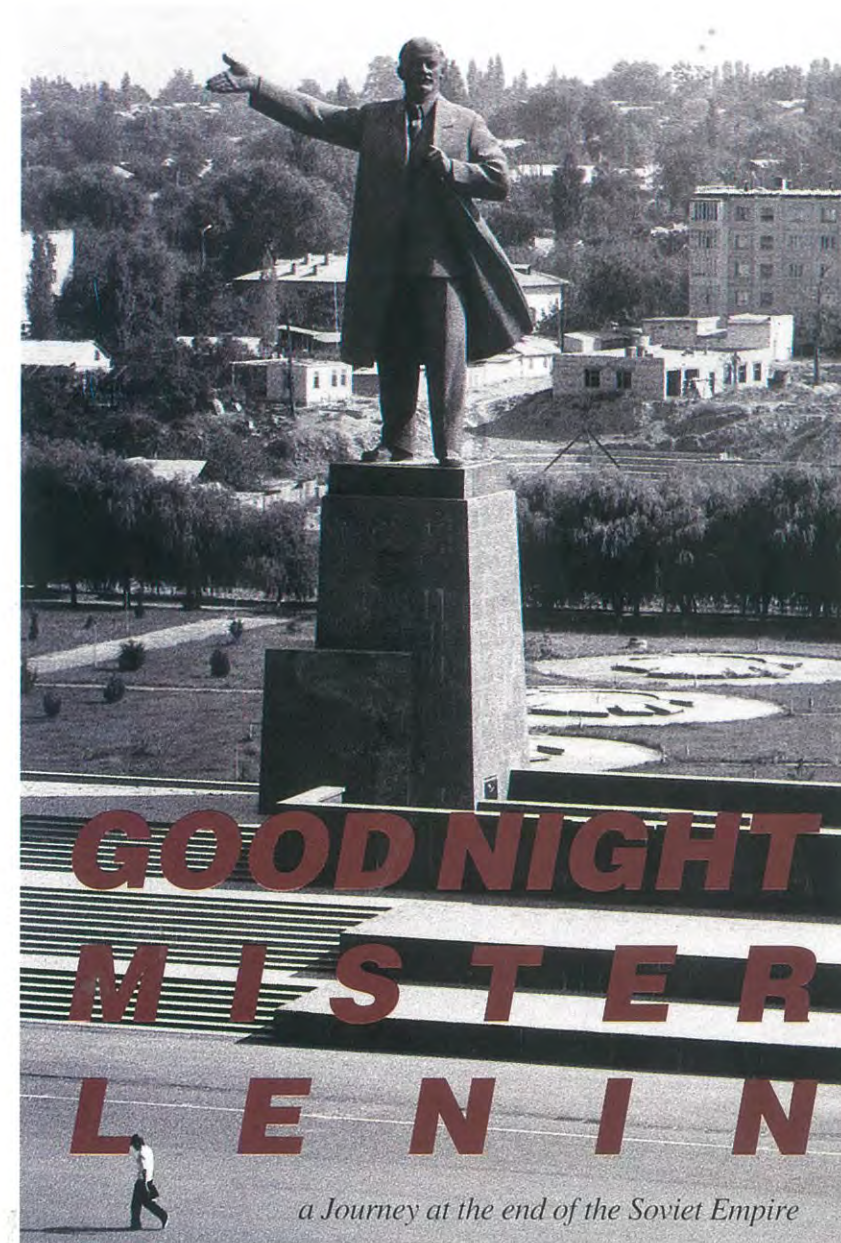


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by Tiziano Terzani

Journeys are pretty much like children: the more unexpected and more unplanned they are, the more extraordinary.

The journey that brought me to be one of the few - possibly the only - Western witnesses of the end of Communism in some of the remotest regions of the Soviet Empire was one of that kind: born by chance.

In February 1991, when the quarrel between Moscow and Tokyo for the control of the Kuriles had started to heat up, I had ob-

tained a rather exceptional visa to travel to those islands "at the end of the world", sunken into the fog of the Northern Pacific. I was there for a month and remained struck by that strange, pathetic, strong race of Russians, men and women, wasted since generations to build and defend the outpost of an idea - Communism - that had no longer any strength or hope of coming true.

"If you are really interested in wasted lives you should come to Siberia!" said a Moscow journalist I met on Kunashir, one of the

Tiziano Terzani recounts the events that led to the writing of his latest book on the collapse of one of the world's most significant modern icons.

four Soviet islands claimed by the Japanese.

That conversation led to an invitation to take part in a joint Soviet-Chinese expedition along the Amur, the great Siberian river that marks one of the longest and most sensitive borders of the world: the one between China and Russia.

A journey by water with stopovers on both banks, in the company of three Soviet journalists and three Chinese, did not sound very exciting, yet the idea of travelling through regions that were romantically famous at the beginning of the century, when the Amur was the most direct line of communication between Japan and Russia tempted me. The idea of being one of the first foreigners to return to some places which had been closed to visitors by the Communist victory in China in 1949, and still more by the Sino-Soviet dispute in the sixties made me accept the offer of sharing the costs of the expedition.

So it was that at the beginning of August, from Bangkok where I live, I set off for the North. I carried the very little baggage with which I have found I can function anywhere: a rucksack with my office - a computer, a printer, my old Leica M2 (bought in Saigon in

Dateline
First Quarter 1994



See, how the mighty are fallen

April 1975 from a thief who had just stolen it from a fleeing American) and a small sports bag with a change of clothes and my running shoes for the four or five kilometres I do every day to keep fit - for a journalist, however electrified, the ability to jump and run away can still be a matter of vital importance.

I expected to be away two weeks. I was away two months. I thought I was simply going to follow a river to the geographical end of the Soviet empire; instead I found myself travelling in the historical end of that empire.

At dawn on the 19th of August, when the junta broadcast its communique deposing Gorbachev and taking all power into its own hands, it was 1:40 in the afternoon on the Amur - such is the time difference between the capital and where my boat was travelling, ten thousand kilometres away. The voice which at that very moment made the announcement to 270 million Soviet citizens boomed metallically from the boat's loudspeakers, and in those tense minutes I shared the emotions of the crew and the Soviet members of the expedition.

Even in the absolute, tranquil indifference of the river and the

surrounding natural world, it was at once clear to me that this news marked a turning point not only for the Soviet Union but for the rest of the world. I was struck by that strange fever that possesses those of my profession whenever history passes close by, the irresistible desire to follow it and watch, even if only to report some small detail.

And so, when the expedition reached the town of Nikolayevsk at the mouth of the Amur, at the far eastern end of the Soviet continent, I left the group and set off on my own with the idea of seeing what the extraordinary events in Moscow meant to the people in the provinces - what changes they brought about in the various republics. I travelled westward, stopping in Siberia and then crossing Central Asia. There, visiting one by one the republics as the empire collapsed and they declared independence, I saw the explosion of a new, dangerous nationalism. And I saw the first expressions of vitality of that old force destined to play a new and very important role in that part of the world: Islam.

In my progress westwards, at times backtracking along the Silk Road, I revisited historical places

looking for the roots of ancient conflicts, repressed by decades of the totalitarian Communist regime, which today are exploding anew with frightening force among the peoples of those regions. I wanted to go to Samarkand and Bukhara, cities whose names have always had an alluring resonance in my mind, where now the history of past centuries is returning massively to the centre of the stage.

From Central Asia I went to the republics of the Caucasus, where the end of the repressive Soviet regime and the new-found liberty are expressed in civil wars which today dominate the life of the people. To get an idea of this new situation I crossed the dangerous frontier that divides the Azerbaijanis from the Armenians, and the less risky, more theatrical barricades in Georgia between the armies of the government and those of the opposition.

Today it is fairly easy to travel in that land which until recently was the rigidly controlled Soviet Union. With a pocketful of dollars and plenty of patience you can go anywhere.

In those two months I took dozens of planes - often with my heart in my throat - and travelled by train, by helicopter, by boat, by bus. In the past, as in all other totalitarian countries, a special visa was required for each Soviet locality you wanted to visit. In theory that is still the case, but today you always find someone prepared to scribble something on a bit of paper and stamp it.

Corruption is everywhere and a traveller can use it to reach his goal. My aim was not to be stopped, to go from city to city, to see, speak with people, make notes in my notebooks and in the evening transfer and amplify them on my

computer.

Often all one needs is a thread to follow in order to understand the world. Once, during the five



Communism gone haywire

years I spent in Japan, our dog Baoli ran away. It took me three days to find him in the efficient labyrinth of Japanese bureaucracy that deals with such things, but at the end I had the feeling that in searching for the dog I had learned things about that country that I never would have known otherwise. This time, travelling in the Soviet Union, I was looking for something much more evanescent but also much more substantial: the corpse of Communism. That search took me a long way.

In all my previous journeys in the Soviet Union I had always been curious about the dozens of statues of Lenin - small, large, middle-sized, gigantic, in bronze, in marble, in cement - which I had seen standing proudly in the square at the centre of every town and village of that immense, but in this respect very monotonous, country. Lenin was always there, present everywhere with his cap

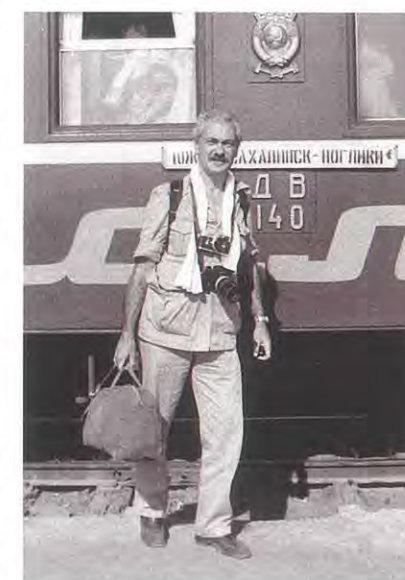
or with a newspaper in one hand and the other raised, gesturing towards a future that never came. The fate of those statues formed a recurrent motif in my latest journey. At Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, I was the only foreigner present when the medieval throng of peasants and mullahs overthrew, in the name of Allah, the first great bronze statue of Lenin in Central Asia. In Ashkhabad I arrived on the morning when the city awoke to discover that the local government, at night, without telling anyone or giving any explanations, had removed the great statue of the father of the Revolution from its place in the main street.

A whole world was toppling around me with those statues and HE, the model of all those representations was the corpse of all corpses I was looking for.

So, after travelling through the whole Soviet Union, after seeing nine of its 15 republics, I decided to go to Moscow. Not to speak to the experts, not to see colleagues or converse with diplomats, but simply to spend an hour in Red Square, to return to the place where it all began, to enter that mausoleum where he, the embalmed Lenin, has remained for decades as an inspiring symbol and a model for all the other Communist mummies from Ho Chi Minh, now installed in the heart of Hanoi, to Mao in his glass sarcophagus at the centre of the centre of China. I walked into the Lenin mausoleum, under the hard eyes of the guards who still scrutinise every visitor and search his pockets, and order "shhh ... shhh" with a peremptory finger to the nose, so that even footsteps will be light and that cadaver, wrapped in silence and suspended in darkness, may

continue to inspire fear and respect. I was happy because I felt that I was witnessing something that would soon be only a memory. There, before that corpse that is now doomed to die, I felt sorry even for him as he lay there, reduced to an empty head and two orange hands: no longer a god, no longer a saint, no longer even a "comrade". As I turned to look at him for the last time, under the suspicious eyes of the KGB guards, I had a spontaneous impulse to smile at him and whisper: 'Good night, Mr Lenin'.

And that is how I have called



Terzani the author, on the Trans-Siberian Railway

this book that, all along the way, with the notes of every evening, got stored up in the memory of the computer.

Journalist's Profile

Tiziano Terzani has lived in Asia for 25 years, witnessing and reporting on its wars and revolutions. Since 1990, his base for roaming the region has been Bangkok.

might not have been worse if, as has happened with other conflicts, the media had just ignored it or dropped it after the first few weeks.

According to the AJR (June '93), for example, Gutman alone had a direct impact on events. As the first United States journalist to report on the Serbian death camps, Gutman has been credited by the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees spokesperson, Sylvana Foa, with having freed at least 6,000 Bosnian prisoners.

Still, Gutman and a number of other influential reporters do not hide their belief that the conflict was due to naked Serbian aggression and that more must be done to stop the Serbs.

Understandably, Gutman, who advocates air strikes and arming the Bosnian Muslims but not the use of ground troops, is frustrated that the Western governments have been so sluggish. But the understandable frustration does not change the questions journalists must continue to ask about their profession.

These questions are real and not the hypothetical ones posed by the Broun citation quoted above. Indeed, Gutman was confronted with one of those questions by AJR interviewer Sherry Ricciardi. After Gutman had said that as a reporter he could not watch passively while people were being killed, Ricciardi asked him whether that meant he would have to step away from the basic tenet of objectivity.

Quoting radio and TV journalist Edward Murrow - "Would you give equal time to Judas Iscariot or Simon Legree?" - Gutman replied: "Some issues simply are not



Snipers at work

equally balanced and we can't give the impression that for every argument on one side, there is an equal one on the other side.

"I don't believe the fairness doctrine applies equally to victims and perpetrators. If you know who is doing what to whom, yes, you've got to give them the right of reply, but you don't owe them equal time."

Gutman makes a strong case, of course. Journalists, more than anybody else, should not be passive when people are being killed if there is something they can do about it. And there are momentous conflicts where the destinies of people and nations are at stake, and right is clearly overwhelmingly on one side.

On the evidence, the Bosnian war is one of them. Even there, the Gutman approach to fair and honest reporting - which may indeed not always be "balanced" - works only in the hands of dedicated, experienced and informed journalists.

For others going about the business of everyday reporting in the 99 per cent of mundane cases, applying that "inequality doctrine" on the basis of a subjective judgment about who is "victim" and who is "perpetrator" invites danger. That very tendency, increasingly prevalent in a new generation of journalists impatient with the very idea of objectivity, is to court the worst kind of advocacy journalism - the sloppy kind.

Journalist's Profile

Sam Lipski is a Melbourne, Australia-based journalist and broadcaster who has worked in print, radio and television in Australia and overseas. During his 33 years in journalism, he has been the foreign editor of *The Bulletin*, the foundation producer of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's TV current affairs program 'This Day Tonight', and the executive producer of ABC's '4 Corners'. He established the Washington Bureau of *The Australian* in 1969 and served as its Washington correspondent until 1973. During this period, Sam also served as Washington correspondent for the *Jerusalem Post*. He has been Australian correspondent for *The Washington Post* and his articles have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Boston Globe*. Sam has also been a radio commentator for the ABC in Melbourne and a television commentator for Channel 9's 'Sunday' and 'Today' programs. A former editor of *Quadrant*, a monthly journal of opinion, he is also a former columnist on foreign affairs and the media for *The Bulletin*. Since 1987, Sam has been the editor and executive publisher of *The Australian Jewish News*, based in Melbourne. This column first appeared in *The Australian*, for which Sam writes a fortnightly column about the press and the media.

Keeping in touch

By Christer Nilsson

General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh is likely to sign up for one of the new digital mobile phone services to be introduced this year. Why? Because he'll no longer risk eavesdropping



General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh is likely to sign up for one of the new digital mobile phone services to be introduced this year. Why? Because he'll no longer risk having embarrassing phone conversations overheard, taped and replayed in Parliament. The new digital services are scrambled to stop eavesdropping by all but the most sophisticated spy agencies. But there's no need for users of

existing analog services to swap over to digital, which would require buying an expensive new handset. When chatting is mainly mundane and the mobile is a backup for long hours spent jammed in Bangkok's notorious traffic, subscribers to existing analog services can be assured there's no need for a swap. What follows is an insightful view of Thailand's mobile services to help prospective users choose a system or existing subscribers understand how the network they signed up to works.

How the systems work: Being a mobile phone operator in Thailand is a very lucrative business - like having a licence to print money. The reasons are obvious. Insufficient conventional telephone lines all over the country and notorious traffic in Bangkok. In Bangkok, a mobile phone helps you keep in touch when you're stuck in traffic jams. In the countryside, going mobile may be the only way to get your own telephone number. You can buy a mobile phone just about everywhere. But purchasing a handset should not be your first priority. Rather, what you buy, and should look out for, is a system - an operator - that fits your requirements. Then it's time to go looking for a trendy handset.

Systems: Four operators have mobile phone systems up and running in Thailand now. The systems are:

* Cellular 900, operated by AIS (Advanced Info Service PLC), an affiliate of the Shinawatra group of companies, under a concession issued by the state-owned TOT (Telephone Organisation of Thailand).

* Worldphone 800, or AMPS 800B, operated by TAC (Total Access Communication Co Ltd), a United Communications (UCOM) company under concession from the state-owned CAT



(Communications Authority of Thailand).

* NMT 470, operated by the TOT.

* AMPS 800 A, operated

runs in the 900 MHz range. NMT technology-based systems are in use in around 35 countries, but Thailand customers cannot roam to them.

* AMPS 800 stands for Advanced Mobile Phone System, operating on the 800 MHz frequency. It is analog and based on Motorola's transmission technology.

AMPS 800 was first introduced in 1978

pean standard.

* GSM stands for Global System for Mobile Communications. The concept was launched as a European initiative in 1982. The first GSM systems were operational in the early 1990s. Worldwide, there are 16 GSM systems in use to-

infrastructure supporting these networks, the first generation Thai mobile phone systems, is not maintained at the same level as the newer privately run systems. The gap is particularly noticeable when it comes to customer service.

The commercially-

people who will use their mobile phone out of town. Cellular 900 covers all provinces in Thailand. But its network in Bangkok is sometimes quite overloaded and congested. At peak hours, congestion is so bad in some areas that incoming or outgoing calls are simply impossible to place. The reverse is true for Worldphone 800. The network is good in Bangkok but poor

user making most calls during business hours and less in evenings and nights and don't receive any incoming calls, your mobile phone bill will be about the same with either system. Whether the digital systems are operational during the first half of this year as promised by operators remains to be seen. Although charges have not yet been unveiled, they are likely to be within the range or slightly higher than the analog options. Both digital systems will initially cover Bangkok.

Digital: What can be said now about the digital systems - GSM 900 and

Worldphone 1800 - is that they will offer outstanding voice quality.

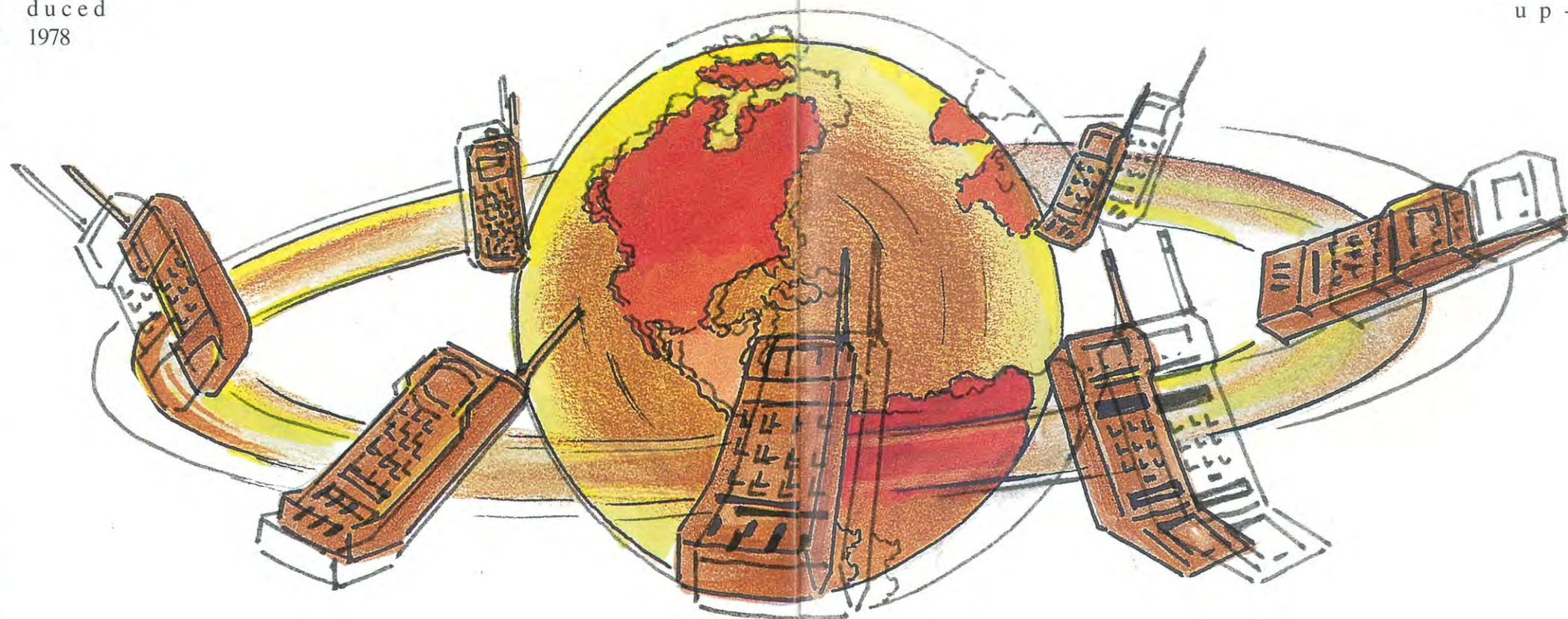
But there is a proviso as long as you are in touch with the network.

There will be no fading or half-cuts during calls - if the connection moves out of range, the line just drops out immediately, without fading.

Security is another important feature of digital systems.

Calls are automatically encrypted and cannot be overheard. Analog systems are not safe in that respect. Conversations are extremely easy to tap. You just need a small multiband receiver with a scanner to overhear calls. Such receivers are sold at most electronics shops in Singapore and Hong Kong. Digital subscribers will get a so-called SIM-card, which is imprinted with a personal identification number, PIN, along with their digital mobile phone subscriptions.

The SIM, also called a "smart



in the US. The difference between the systems in Thailand is the group of frequencies they use, not basic technology. 60 countries use the AMPS 800 system.

* PCN 1800 is basically the same technology as Global System for Mobile (GSM) but tuned up to 1800 MHz. Such systems are operational in Germany and the UK. PCN was developed by European governments and manufacturers. It is a an-Euro-

day and 21 are being installed. GSM uses the 900 MHz range.

Differences : As far as users are concerned, the main difference between the mobile phone systems used in Thailand is their area of geographical coverage. The two government-run systems, NMT 470 and AMPS 800A, cover most parts of Thailand. But the

oriented private operators, however, maintain a high degree of customer service and look after their networks better: after all, that is their selling point. Of the established systems, that leaves us with Cellular 900 and Worldphone 800. Basically, Cellular 900 is the best choice for

country. Outside Bangkok, in areas where there are no Worldphone 800 base stations, traffic is channelled through CAT's older AMPS 800A system.

Charges : Cellular 900 has a simple tariff structure while Worldphone 800 has a whole array of traffic charges - but 800 is not necessarily more expensive than 900. If you are a "normal"

card", comes in the size of a credit card and its built-in microprocessor and memory contains all subscriber information, services chosen, etc.

You plug this card into a slot in the phone (any GSM 900 or Worldphone 1800 phone) and the handset is operational.

This is not only a security feature; while travelling, you can leave your own phone at home. Just bring the SIM-card and rent or borrow a digital phone on arrival. You will automatically be billed to your subscription back home.

Decision : If the price is right, digital systems may catch on here. Europe has good analog systems, except for Germany and France, so migration to GSM and PCN has not been as rapid there as the digital operators had predicted. Still, Germany already has 600,000 digital phone users. But Bangkok's analog systems are overloaded, a factor that bodes well for the digital systems - if the price is right, mind you. Finally, a mention of NMT 470 again. Although it's old and government-run, the system's mostly car-mounted, bulky and heavy mobile phone sets have high output and wide reach. So if you don't mind such drawbacks as size and weight, or plan to use your phone in-car only, and don't mind some hassling with a government-style service, you might give NMT 470 a thought.

Buying a phone: When you buy a mobile phone, pick a brand and model that offers service and maintenance in Thailand. Otherwise you will run into the infamous paperwork carousel involved in taking technical things in and out of

Thailand. Modern mobile phones are full of features, some of which you will never use. The basic things to look for are size, weight, battery life, power output, voice quality, illumination. The rest is icing on the cake: 99-number & name & address memory, adjustable ringer etc. Nowadays, most mobile phones come loaded with most of this gadgetry extravaganzas as standard. The best advice is to go for a mobile phone that you find has the best look and feel. It's really important, so don't overlook it, because this thing will be your daily companion. Once again I mention NMT 470, known for its bulky and heavy mobile phones. Actually, there are hand-held 470 phones available. And ironically the most advanced hand-held phone available in Thailand today is made for the 470 system. It comes from Benefon in Finland and was launched here recently. This is not only a handheld mobile phone, but also a fax and data terminal, albeit with a very small display. For, digital mobile phones it's a case of wait and see. All major manufacturers make them. In Europe, GSM and PCN mobile phones have been priced above analog counterparts, which is not really justifiable from a technical standpoint. Digital is actually cheaper to manufacture than analog. Nevertheless, you will be charged some 15%-20% more for a digital GSM handset than an analog one here in Thailand, according to sources in AIS. As for Worldphone 1800, there's as yet no indication of price. Analog handsets are getting cheaper and cheaper and Worldphone 800 phones are usually cheaper than

Cellular 900 phones. Sometimes a Worldphone 800 handset sells for under Bt20,000. But whatever system and phone you choose, make sure that you get a working telephone number when you buy the phone, not "after two days" or "soon".

Freaks on the move:

You can hook up a fax, a portable computer and a modem on your mobile phone and send or receive faxes and data files. Some mobile phone manufacturers have developed whiz-bang add-on-products. Nokia recently launched a neat mobile data communications - for analog systems - kit here with credit-card-size modem and wiring. This may work upcountry. But as far as Bangkok is concerned, network congestion will impede transmission quality and reliability. This is particularly true for data communications. But this will change with the digital networks. They have been designed to accommodate fax and data communications. However, you will still need special equipment to make it work. Check with your mobile phone vendor whether it intends to import GSM faxes and modems.

Journalist's Profile

Christer Nilsson moved to Bangkok in March as regional business affairs, IT, advertising media and general news correspondent for Swedish publications. He spent the previous eight years in Sweden as an IT-writer for the computer weekly *Datavärlden*.

Wattachak Building



Another daily hits the streets

by Julian Gearing

As any journalist or newspaper editor knows, competition between publications can be tough when dealing with a limited market. It was therefore with some surprise that established hacks in Bangkok greeted the news that Thailand was to get another English language daily.

With the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* as well-entrenched quality dailies, a new English language paper faces tough competition in a

market which many believe is saturated. Long-resident journalists remember the rise and demise of *Bangkok World* and *Business Times* and wonder how a new venture will fare.

The idea of *Thailand Times* first came up two years ago when Wattachak, the publisher of over a dozen Thai-language publications, thought about tackling the English market. Plans on the drawing board, however, can take time to be realised and it wasn't until the beginning of the hot season that

desks, computers and phones were installed in a shop-house next door to the Wattachak building.

The publication is targeting foreign as well as Thai readers. It is attempting to be lighter and easier to read than its competitors, though as time goes on the paper hopes to provide solid material which is relatively easy to read.

Anybody who has been involved in setting up a new publication knows that things seldom go to plan. This was definitely the case with *Thailand Times*. Ini-

tially the problem was finding staff. Even with a skeleton crew it was difficult to reach the theoretical print deadline. Launch deadlines were also ripped off the wall when the date passed. At a time when most of Bangkok's bars were long closed, staff at the paper were still slaving away laying out pages on the Mac machines. In the early days, a 4 a.m. finish was the norm, not the exception.

But the infusion of more staff, a move to the main Wattachak building, and the pressure to make or break the idea, saw the paper soft launch on 28 October 1993. The initial response was mixed. The paper turned up in a few hotels and in company offices around town and was generally considered to be acceptable for a new publication. Few at the early stage, however, were willing to forsake their normal daily for the new offering.

What most people were not aware of at that time was that *Thailand Times* was running with a very limited number of staff. The paper employs around sixty reporters and editorial staff: roughly a quarter of the number at the *Bangkok Post* or at *The Nation*. The *Post* has a brand new, high-tech building; Wattachak has eight storeys, but *Thailand Times* takes up a mere half a floor.

In addition to these problems were the matters of staff and the teething problems as the paper began to crawl. Few experienced newspaper hacks are going to drop jobs to come and join a paper that is not yet established. Getting enough experienced personnel has therefore been one problem, though some veterans have been banging on the door.

Other problems were similar to



In the Features Section at Thailand Times

those which seem to affect many an emerging venture. A "pool system" of reporters, which combined *Thailand Times* reporters with those of *Wattachak*, took a little time to get up and running. Clashes between personnel, between departments, and the common problems of smooth cooperation between "farang" and Thai staff took some ironing out. Some problems were resolved - and others created - after a few heated drinking sessions, the normal way hacks seem to let off steam in a steamy metropolis.

A day in the life of *Thailand Times* is anything but dull. As with any newspaper office, the excitement of keeping up with the latest stories, both local and international, keeps the place buzzing. Much of the pressure and the excitement is because the paper is understaffed. Everybody is under pressure to work hard. But as many are finding, it can be a great learning experience. And the opportunities are open for new ideas and participation in a host of areas which may not be possible in a larger, more established, organisation.

In the early stages it was common to run over the deadlines set at 11 p.m. for rewriters, 11.30 p.m. for sub editors, and 1 a.m. for the

art department. Yet practice makes something close to perfect, and even with few staff the paper is now being put to bed on time.

From concentrating on speed, the paper is now looking at a gradual process of improvement. Quality, naturally, needs to be upgraded, and attention to detail needs careful scrutiny. Mistakes occasionally slip in through the net, but even established publications suffer from hiccups.

Thailand Times is going through the growing process. Many areas in the paper need improvement and the search is on for better material both from within the paper and from outside experienced freelancers. Feelers are also being put out to find experienced staff to inject quality into the paper. While the place may not offer sure-fire security, it can offer excitement, a challenge, and the chance to do more than is often possible on a bigger publication. From 1 December, the paper began to be seen in the provinces as *Wattachak* used its distribution network to test the waters outside of Bangkok.

Thailand Times faces an uphill battle against solid competition. This may not be an impossible battle to win, but a lot more beer may need to be drunk before the paper gets things a hundred per cent right.

Journalist's Profile

Julian Gearing has lived in Thailand for six years, covering Muslim Asia - Afghanistan, Iraq and the central Asian republics. He took up as a sub-editor with the *Thailand Times* for the experience of working with an emerging newspaper.

Wandering Eye



threats. An example of advanced social graces.

Panadda Lertlum-Ampai of Kyodo News Service stepped down from

the FCCT executive committee after several years of tirelessly organising programs. While members must be reminded of her effort, not so the foreign ministry. A newcomer to the skill of program organisation trying hopelessly to follow in Panadda's footsteps had occasion recently to contact the foreign ministry in search of information of the visit of a regional statesman. The director general of the information office sent the hapless correspondent scampering off in the direction of the press office. It, however, knew nothing of the planned visit or newspaper report that had provided the lead that a potential FCCT function could be secured. Back to the director-general's office. Perhaps a contact in the Cambodian section might help, asked the reporter. Well, came the reply, I don't know who that would be, said the DG's office. "Do you know Khun Panadda?" the reporter was asked. "Yes but she's not on the executive anymore," was the answer. "But she'd know who to get in touch with," came

the rejoinder from the DG's desk. The nimble-footed correspondent came across the contact by an alternative mode as Khun Panadda happened to be unavailable but Wandering Eye is certain she would have gone directly to the source. It's nice to know her contacts are recognised where it matters.

While Australians were out fighting a blaze of bushfires circling the country's largest city, Sydney, in early January, that peripatetic Dane Kim Wiesener braved the heavy smoke haze to do his bit....playing the notorious one-armed bandits. Correspondent for Copenhagen daily Politiken, Wiesener set off from his Kings Cross hotel clutching a wad full of Australian dollar notes that he planned to fritter away during his last night on the town. Clutching a pot of the ubiquitous amber fluid in one hand and the pokey's arm in the other, Wiesener swung the night away to end the night 300 Australian dollars richer. No doubt this great Dane will do well in the Year of the Dog.

Earavan - The Magazine' really is a splendid addition

to the Bangkok English-language magazine market. Its inaugural issue in January showcased a striking black and white photo-essay by the FCCT's very own award-winning photographer, Philip Blenkinsop, the man for whom fashion statements are a reason for living. The magazine also carried an article by Nate "Kouprey" Thayer concerning an extremely muddy off-road rally in Borneo that he recently gritted out with David McKaige. ("There were snakes in the water. Leeches in the trees, and all around us mosquitoes were having a feast....") McKaige is described by Thayer as the "crack South-east Asian Bureau Chief for Reuters TV," which will no doubt come as a terrible shock to anyone who thought he was American. In his usual direct manner, Thayer reveals how the great adventure forced itself upon him: "I had to choose between the jungles of Borneo or unemployment and the Betty Ford Clinic". There has to be a strong suspicion that Thayer, possibly refreshed with a customary bottle or two of Smirnoff, was responsible for the notes about Blenkinsop that appeared on page 8 of the glittering organ. Hold your breath for this one: "An Anglo-Australian photo-journalist aesthete whose uncompromising approach to his work consistently outrages his colleagues' machismo sensibilities, Philip Blenkinsop has spent the past five years in Asia and Indochina hunting down images with an edge, which has become the indelible trademark of his notoriety." Answers on a postcard, please....

In Memory of Michael Jensen



Michael Jensen, a long-time member of the FCCT, was killed by an elephant in Sangkhlaburi on February 18th, one week prior to his 37th birthday. An English major from the University of Copenhagen, Michael was the local representative of the Danish tour company, Globetrotter, and had for several years been taking tourists from Denmark on trips around Thailand. His real passion, however, was writing.

At the FCCT, where he spent many a Monday and Wednesday night, Michael found some of the inspiration that was lacking in his daily work. He always enjoyed coming here and was easily recognisable in the crowd, being perhaps the only club stalwart to consistently wear shorts. He took part in FCCT events with enthusiasm when he was in town, the last special occasion being that memorable Sunday afternoon at the Royal Garden River Resort.

Michael tried his luck as a freelance journalist in South East Asia in the late 1980s, but in spite of his talent and a number of well received articles, he ultimately found it too difficult to break through in the Danish market. At his untimely death, he was dreaming of having another go at it, and would, I'm sure, have had a decent chance of establishing himself in the profession. Alas, his dream was never to be fulfilled.

Michael is survived by his mother in Denmark, his girlfriend here in Thailand and a number of mourning friends around the world. We will all miss his excellent company.

Journalist's Profile

Kim Wiesener is a Bangkok based journalist who covers the region for Politiken, a Danish daily newspaper.

A Regal Regatta

By Patrick Cusick

arrived on the island in force and the stories - filed daily - provided readers with an insight into what international yacht racing is all about.

The Bangkok Post started the ball rolling with a royal salute to the kingdom's premier yachting event with a in-depth King's Cup preview that stole most of the Sunday Post's back page sport coverage.

There were reports that sports editor Edward Thangarajah was coming to island for special coverage, but had to cancel his Phuket flight at the last moment.

Not to be outdone, *The Nation* flew its ace sports reporter Alan Parkhouse to provide some punch for its daily reports. *The Thailand Times* assigned sports editor John Grevatt and a resident freelancer to match the competition.

And, with the familiar face of AP's Denis Gray hovering around the Phuket Yacht Club press room overlooking Nai Harn Bay - Asia's premier yacht race showed all the signs of having made the big time. Denis, who's always in the front line for any breaking news story in the region, enjoyed his work on Phuket Island.

"A lot more pleasant than the Cambodian elections. Hopefully I can return for the next regatta. It's one of Asia's top sporting events



The essential ingredients for a good story had been in place ever since the Phuket King's Cup Regatta was first raced in December 1987.

The fastest keelboats in Asia, a regal regatta dedicated to the King of Thailand, the social elite gathering

at the Phuket Yacht Club Hotel and the final leg of the Austral-Asia yacht racing circuit had all been written but, for reasons unknown, had struggled to make it "big" on the back page of daily newspapers.

But the 7th King's Cup was a different story. The Thai media

and the working press can have a lot of fun too," said Denis before wiring the race winners to the world.

For the record, Singapore retained the King's Cup for the second successive year when an Australian-Singapore crew on board Jenny II just nudged Neil Pryde's Hong Kong hi-tech speedster Hi-Flyer.

"I'll be back again next year with a faster boat," declared the popular New Zealand sailmaker.

Pryde spent an estimated \$50,000 on his campaign. "I'm not complaining. I had a good time racing in paradise."

Third place went to Thailand's hat-trick winner Buzzard with Bill Gasson's foreign legion (the crew flew in from four countries) unable to bring His Majesty's prestigious cup back to the favoured shores.

"It was a great regatta. We tried to win but the competition was too good on the day," said Gasson who, as well as racing, is president of the regatta's organising committee.

Gasson will have a bigger and faster boat in the event next year and will be a top contender to win the cup for a record fourth time.

But back to the press show. The number of visiting reporters to the island really began to swell on the third day of the regatta with the arrival a busload of reporters mostly representing Thai magazines and newspapers.

The presence of 20-plus press hounds had the regatta race officials huddled behind closed doors for "off the record" conferences as they determined handicap ratings and settled disputes.



Officials were put under pressure when the final results took several hours to process.

"Who won?" cried the press.

"It's not like it used to be," lamented one race official. "Bring back the days when the sailboards joined the cruising yachts. It's now all fast yachts, protests and a lot of organising."

Big boats are right. Three maxis took part in the regatta. They didn't win any silver but dominated the scene as they flew spinnakers majestically on the downward Andaman Sea Cup race from Phi Phi island.

"It's not the America's Cup, but who knows how big the King's Cup will grow," said Asian Marine Trader editor-in-chief Captain Phil Vidal, a keen yachtsman from Singapore.

The keel yachts racing flotilla fell a few boats short of the expected 100, but next year entries are almost certain to reach the magic century mark when the Europa Around The World Yacht Race links up with the King's Cup fleet.

"It's become Asia's most enjoyable yacht race," enthuses international lawyer, Chris King, who's one of the regatta's two founding fathers. "The media have realised how much support we are getting. There's a huge fleet now

taking part with yachts from all seven seas."

The King's Cup employed NOW public relations to handle press releases and to keep the media informed during the week-long event.

"The whole show went pretty smoothly. The press were able to get their stories and have a good time," said

NOW's director M.R. Usnisa Sukhsvasti.

Most of the press were provided with accommodation at the five-star Le Meridien Resort. Some of the specialist yachting scribes stayed at the Phuket Yacht Club, dining at the Quarter Deck and the Regatta Bar & Grill.

The socialising took place at the night-time cocktail parties and lavish buffets. The races did dominate the day activities but the night functions were indeed the place to be seen - even if you're only chasing a story.

Journalist's Profile

Patrick Cusick lives in Phuket and is founding editor of Phuket Magazine, Bangkok Airways' inflight magazine Fa Thai and the capital's first free newspaper, Bangkok Trader. An Australian, Patrick has been a journalist for more than 20 years working in radio, wire and print media.

Photographer John Everingham is correspondent for Black Star Publishing Company and publisher of Phuket Magazine, Fa Thai and Heritage, the Heritage Club magazine. A long term resident of Thailand, John now spends much of his time capturing the lifestyle around the islands of the Andaman Sea.