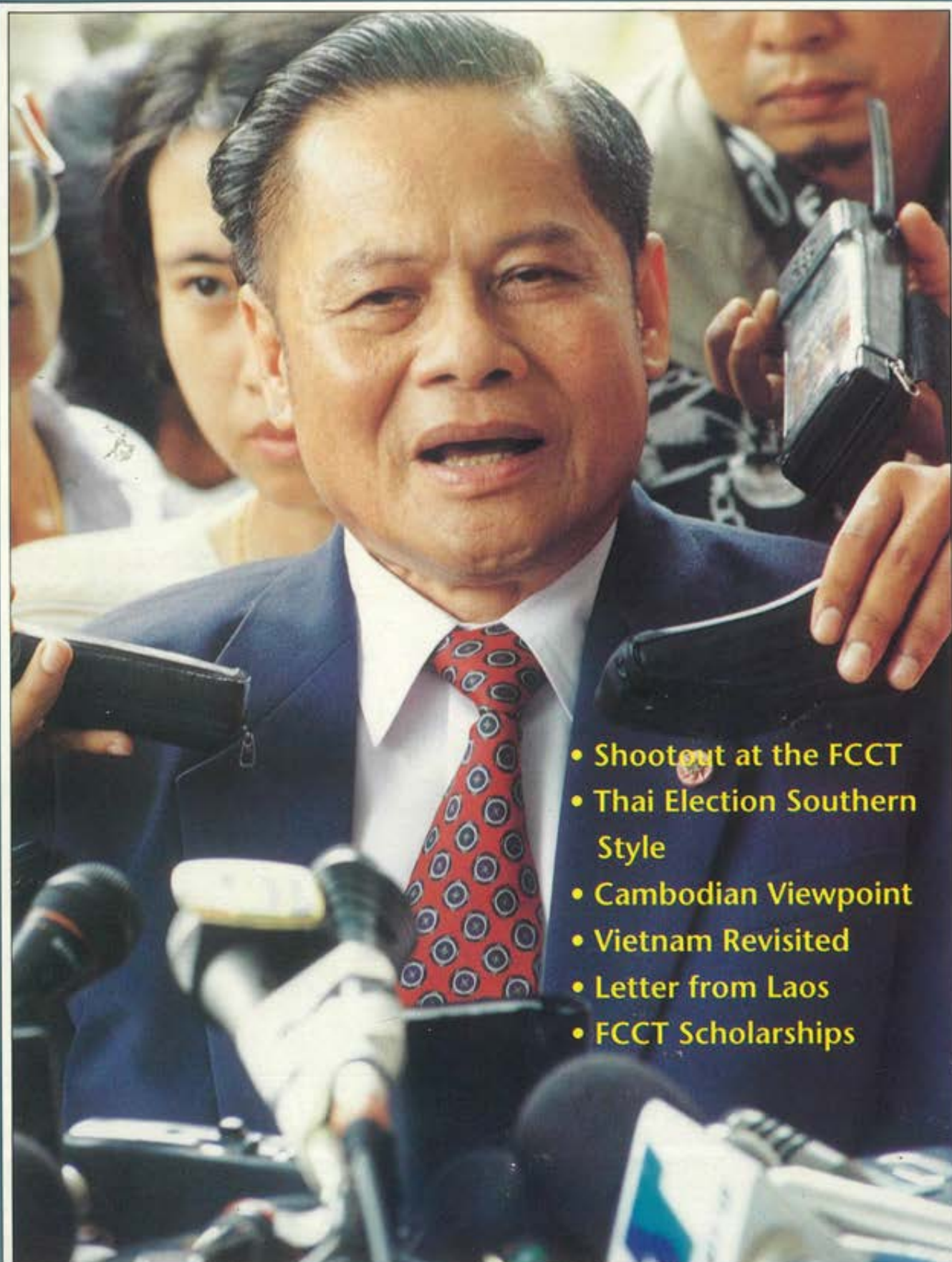


The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine

Second Quarter 1995

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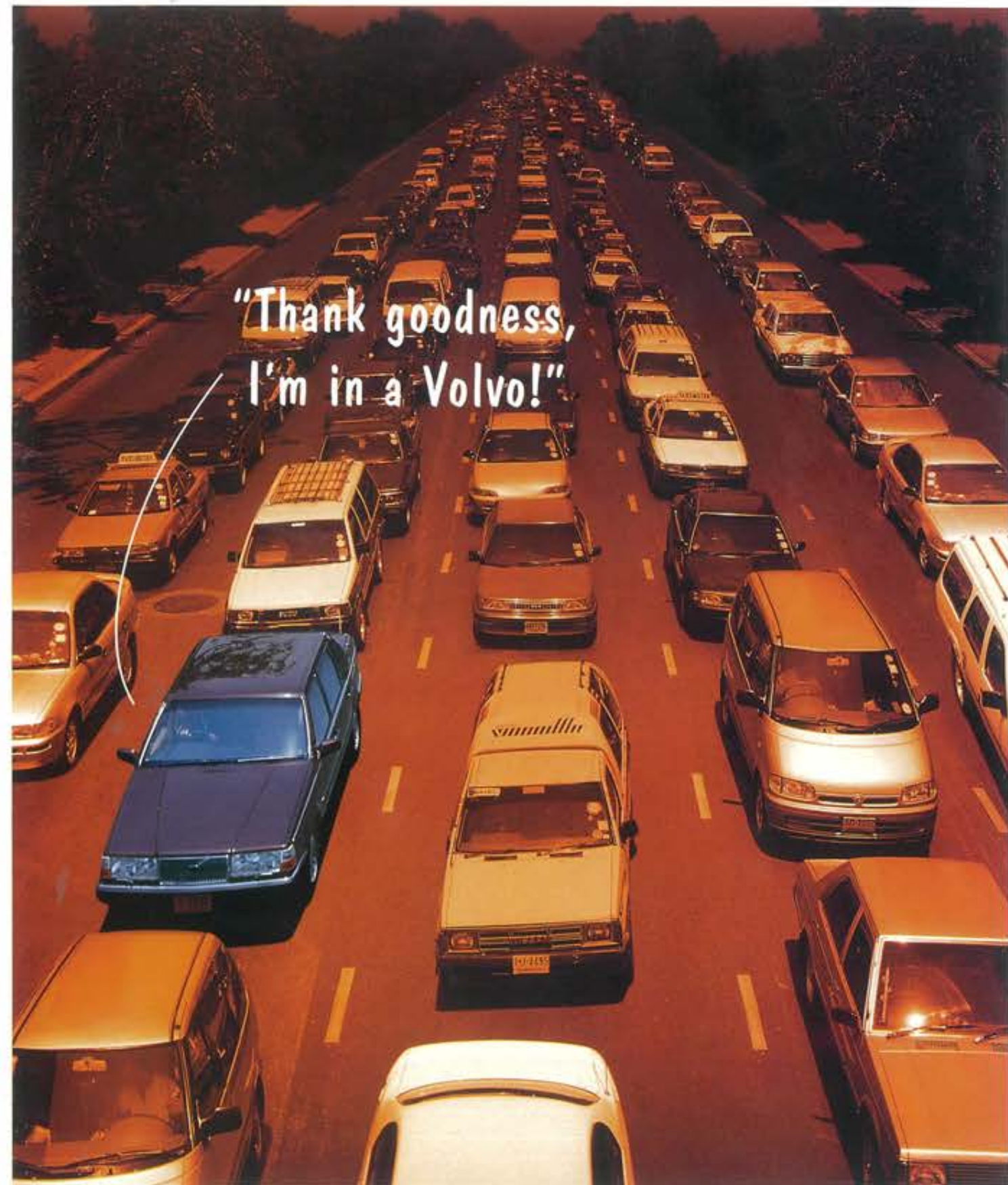
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Dateline

• BANGKOK •

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FRONT COVER

Chart Thai Party leader Banharn Silpa-archa mobbed by reporters after his party's victory in the July 2 election. Photo by Sakchai Lalit of the Associated Press. Photo courtesy of the Associated Press.

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A Letter from your President

For the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, 1995 shall soon become one of the most crucial years in club history.

When I accepted an invitation to run for the presidency last year, I was aware that the clubhouse move was likely. But I was also told by my predecessor, Bertil Lintner, that the decision to move would be absolutely up to the 1995 executive board.

The clubhouse relocation was one of the very first tasks the 1995 board had to tackle. During the first ten weeks after taking office, board members worked intensively to find the best solution on the clubhouse issue. We knew our decision would have a significant and lasting impact on the club's future. As all of you know, we chose to move to a new location, and the majority voted to move the club to the Jewelry Trade Center.

The club has come a long way since the 1950s, when a group of journalists met weekly at Mizu's Kitchen in Patpong to chat and organize professional and social activities. During its nearly 40-year history, the club evolved and grew, pivoting its activities on intellectually substantive talks. With time, these programs were expanded to appeal to the diverse interests of FCCT's growing membership. Major events, especially addresses and speeches by Thai and international VIPs, have been countless. It shall certainly be the same, or even better, in the future.

As outstanding as the club is today, the executive board recognized the need to find a new location where the FCCT can comfortably call home for

at least the next decade, which will take us into the new century.

The Jewelry Trade Center's generous four million baht allocation to the club cannot take us very far in real terms at today's cost. We are building a brand new 335-square meter clubhouse from scratch. It will be equipped with the latest state of the art, audio-visual auxiliaries and international communication facilities. The new FCCT clubhouse will not only be one of the most modern, private clubs in town but also a very unique professional club serving people in various sectors of today's media world.

To make our dream come true, the executive board needs a helping hand from all members. The big clubhouse move later this year coincidentally and auspiciously comes just before the FCCT's 40th anniversary celebration next year. Under such circumstances, the board has deemed it most proper to launch a major fund-raising project. Associate Director of Publicity Hasan Basar and Associate Director of Programs André McNicoll have worked out details of the "FCCT 40th Anniversary Appeal." Through this fund-raising effort, the club hopes to raise the necessary funds for the completion of the new clubhouse and for further expansion of FCCT activities.

While the appeal package is under preparation, construction on the new



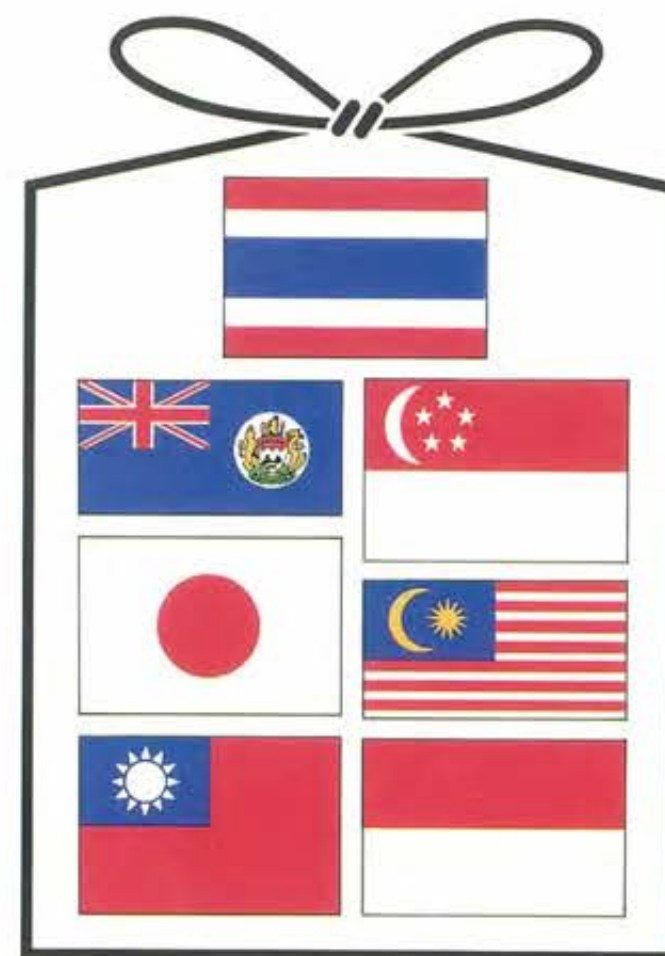
clubhouse has already begun. Utopia, the general contractor, is working under the direction of our interior designer SDS Asia. We are now looking forward to an actual move-in date in mid-September.

Our technical adviser Phillippe Decaux has purchased the needed audio-visual equipment for the club, and the Clubhouse Committee is busy considering additional options such as a "Smart-Card" identification system and a separate air-conditioning system for the club. Whether we'll decide to purchase these options depends on the response to our 40th Anniversary fund-raising campaign which we will launch in late July.

As FCCT president, may I ask for your generous cooperation in the club's 40th Anniversary Appeal, details of which will be available to all of you by the time this issue of Dateline is in your hands.

Panadda L.

Panadda Lertlum-Ampai
1995 FCCT President



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SHOOTOUT AT THE FCCT

BERNARD TRINK VS THE POLITICALLY CORRECT FEMINIST BRIGADE

By James Eckardt

They're out there.

Scheming, skulking, plotting, writing enraged letters to the Post Wingebug, organizing seminars and task forces on "gender issues" — a cabal of miserable Western feminists are beavering away in Bangkok.

Their tragedy is to be marooned in a fun-loving country. The target of their outrage is a little street in Bangkok known as Patpong. They don't seem to notice a legion of monster surreal Romanesque pleasure palaces — Karaoke! Snooker! Nightclub singers! Massage Parlor, Brothel! — sprouting everywhere in a city of seven million.

No, their laser-beamed focus is on Patpong — what they really don't like is white guys having a good time — and their special target is Patpong's weekly chronicler, one harmless drudge named Bernard Trink.

Now you don't know this because your muzzle is plunged into a beer mug in some raucous hellhole on Patpong or Soi Cowboy but if these femi-nazis get what they want not only will they shut down your watering hole forever but they'll dispatch your hooker girlfriends to... do what? Work construction? Plant rice? They've been there, done that.

Why do the girls do what they do?

For the same reason I am writing this story: money.

Pok, a teen-aged waitress I met about two years ago, was at the time making 2,000 baht a month and all the *gai yang* (barbequed chicken) she could eat. In her new job entertaining Japanese businessmen at Thaniya Plaza she makes that in a night — an hour! — and I would no more dream of rescuing Pok from her life of prostitution than I would ask for her to rescue me from journalism.

But back to Bernard Trink. Nobody I know likes Trink but everyone reads him. He does not inspire the affection

of readers like, say, Roger Crutchley does. The best of Thailand's humorists — Crutch, S. Tsow, Colin Cotterill, Steve Rosse — are generally good for a half dozen laugh lines per page. (Dave Barry manages that many in a paragraph, a sentence, but Dave Barry is possessed by the Devil). As for Bernard Trink, the times I've laughed at one of his lines — and I've been reading him for 17 years — can be counted on one finger.

His column is a farrago of self-righteous self-promotion — he never tires of telling you how honest he is — shopping tips, lame puns, lugubrious anecdotes (TIT! Manure!), and a lengthy concluding quote from a mediocre book and BUT I DON'T GIVE A HOOT! He performs a function, though, warning of ripoff bars and alerting barfly deadbeats to the latest freebie. The feminists are screaming to shut his column down: Murder the Messenger. But, hell, his tame little page is nothing compared to the heyday of the old Bangkok World tabloid. Eight years ago, every Friday, old Trink had six pages devoted to hookers from Bangkok to Pattaya. Three micro-bikined go-go dancers would be grinning furiously and dancing their butts off for the camera and the caption would read: "Three reasons for hitting the Limelight Bar. Can you spot the *katoey* (transvestite)?"

I say let Trink be. But nooooo, the feminist cabal got what they wanted: Trink led to a Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT) Wednesday night seminar, furnished with blindfold and cigarette, and hauled up before a firing squad of the Politically Correct (P.C.) Feminist Brigade.

Now the FCCT, to my knowledge, has hosted two feminist seminars. The first was packed with strange looking people I had never seen before. There was a stunning 6-foot blond wearing a cowboy hat who made a spectacular entrance on the arm of another woman. On the panel that night were

three sweet Thai *ajahns* (professors) who quietly and firmly nailed down their case for sexual equality in the Thai legal system. There were no fireworks.

Not so the second time. A smug Canadian feminist ran something called Media Watch, dedicated to stomping out the use of sexy women in advertisements. As she flipped through her slide show presentation of gorgeous babes selling stuff, the hacks along the bar — male and female — sniggered and guffawed and asked each other: "What's wrong with that?"

Now I had resolved to keep my mouth shut but suddenly this woman showed a slide of a six-year-old who was a dead ringer for my daughter Erika and said that the shampoo ad — "Nice and Gnarly" — was a seductive pitch for pedophilia. I rose to the defense of my daughter and concluded:

"Look, I'm sorry we're all laughing at you. I'm sure this kind of feminist semiotics is all the rage in North America but we're expatriates and we just think it's silly. And your Media Watch seems suspiciously like some kind of P.C. Thought Police."

"I hate that term!" she snapped back. "There is no such thing as Political Correctness!"

"Right, and the Italians say there is no Mafia."

A friend of mine from California backed me up. "I'm a feminist," she told the lady. "But you've just got a dirty mind."

Still, I've been in Thailand long enough not to get pleasure out of these confrontations. I certainly have no axe to grind against women. My wife is a woman and, in the context of our marriage, I'm the whetstone. More importantly, when it comes to my three daughters, I'm a raging gut feminist. Do I want my daughters

reduced to simpering, docile housewives? Hell, no! After appropriate post graduate degrees, I expect them to plunge into the business jungle, fangs and claws aglint, and hack out a millionaire's fortune before they're thirty and marry obscenely rich husbands so they can support, lavishly, their old dad in his dotage.

So what was I doing on Wednesday night, February 8, attending a showdown between the humorless P.C. Feminist Brigade and the humorless Bernard Trink? Well, like the girls on Patpong, I was getting paid for it.

The FCCT is packed. Friends, male and female, I haven't seen in months are bellied up three-deep to the bar. Trink makes an unobtrusive entrance, a wizened pot-bellied gnome with trousers pulled up to his clavicle. My Californian feminist friend, Jennifer Gampell, steps up to the microphone to introduce him to the crowd, apologizing for being "a virgin

moderator", and gives Trink the stage.

"If you're really a virgin," Trink intones into the microphone, "you can ask for a lot more than a normal girl would." This gets a laugh. Trink holds up the FCCT weekly flyer. "I read this a few minutes ago; it says I've been here in Thailand since the 1950's... Don't tell Immigration."

"When I was invited to speak tonight, I asked: what about? They said nothing, just be yourself. Looking at this flyer now, I discover I do have a topic: Why the Night Owl plays a vital role in media today." Long pause. "Who, me?"

A loud laugh from the crowd. With his strong New York accent, Trink has the finely-honed timing and deadpan delivery of a Jewish comedian. He warms to his story of how he started his "entertainment" column for the now-defunct *Bangkok World*, back in 1965. Long before the advent of Patpong, he trolled the bars of Klong Toey port and discovered he had a

topic. "There were live shows even then: a woman pulling a snake out of herself. I asked: how did you get it inside? I found 13-year-old girls with more experience than me, sitting in men's laps. I looked in the faces of these girls and they were not crying inside. Nonsense! They were preparing for negotiations. One point is obvious. They do it for the money and they don't want to do anything else. There were social commentators, women, university grads, who said these girls are exploited. We have to save them, get them out of that environment. Let them be servants or paint umbrellas."

"I told the bargirls this and they laughed for thirty minutes. Asked them if they wanted to paint umbrellas, weave baskets. They said, 'You crazy? I earn a hundred baht for a drink, instead of a hundred a month.' The cliché on Thai TV shows is the poor prostitute crying buckets. They don't cry buckets. They want money and they'll do anything to get it."



SHOOTOUT AT THE FCCT

Trink moves on to the hate mail he inspires. "The holy rollers tell me I'll burn in hell, fire, brimstone, snakes. No heaven for me. I get stacks of letters: You bastard, why don't you die? ... You sonofabitch, look over your shoulder in a bar and I'll be there. ... Asshole, I'll get you and your family. ... The hate Trink crowd are the first in line to buy the Saturday Bangkok Post. They're frustrated if it's delayed, if they don't have Trink to hate this week. If they leave the country, they still get the Post. I get a letter from Iceland: You scumbag."

Claiming that humility is not in his nature, Trink goes on to list "accomplishments" for which he never got credit. Supposedly, his column has prompted: telephone booths on New Road, movie theaters in department stores, a pedestrian overpass on New Petchburi Road, a widening of the approach to MBK, the construction of shops and bars underneath the Expressway. ... "Modest, I'm not."

He wraps up his talk with an estimate of Patpong bargirl's earnings. She makes between 4,500 and 6,500 baht a month, depending if she is dancing clothed, topless or nude. But this is just pocket money. If she is taken out every night of the month, she's making 75,000 baht, plus drink tips, tax free. His estimate of the number of hookers in Thailand: 300,000. "That's one percent of the female population and that's what I'm writing about," he concludes. "If you want to be angry at me, go ahead. But I'm not writing about the other 99 percent."

Bernard Trink gets a round of

applause. It's question time now and the audience braces itself gleefully for the feminist counterattack. And. ... nothing. Of the twenty people who pose questions, only three are women.

"You're always writing about the same bars," one guy notes. "Do you feel that you're not cut out for the job anymore, that you're too old?"

"No."

"In Australia, a prostitute costs 700 dollars," another guy follows up. "There seems to be a question of supply and demand. Would you care to address this question?"

"No."

Finally, Jennifer Gampell asks: "As a responsible journalist, don't you feel you have an obligation to inform the public about AIDS?"

Trink replies that there is a theory that HIV does not necessarily lead to AIDS. "There is no AIDS on Patpong. Bargirls are a high risk group, so why not? Tell me where and I'll go there tonight. I try to give both sides of the AIDS argument." He holds up a book by a doctor claiming that heterosexual sex is not linked to AIDS. "You be the judge."

A half dozen questions later, a woman journalist challenges Trink: "You say that there's no proof of an HIV link to AIDS. Why don't you apply yourself as a newsman to investigate, instead of being a conduit for any misinformation that crosses your desk?"

"I'd have to give up what I do. You have your belief. I try to present all views."

The journalist sits down, muttering, "Like the Nazi view of the Holocaust?"

The questions taper to a halt. No fireworks. Trink concludes: "I may be older than the hills but seeing thirteen naked dancers keeps me going." The crowd has been drifting away.

Afterwards at the bar, a journalist tells me that six of her friends left out of boredom. "There's no reason to get up for what the old duffer was saying. When I first came here, I might have squashed him but I've been in Thailand for three and a half years and what's the point? I mean, why bother?"

That seemed to be the consensus amid the seasoned Bangkok hands, women who work in journalism, advertising, TV, radio. At the FCCT, for that night anyway, there was just no base of P.C. airheads to get thrown into a tizzy.

Maybe they're not out there.

.....

James Eckardt, Associate Editor of Manager magazine, has lived in Thailand for 18 years and moved to Bangkok from Songkhla two and a half years ago. James, who seems envious of Trink's collection of hate mail, can rest assured that after the publication of this article, he'll soon be able to start his own collection.

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Thai Election Southern Style

MICHAEL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ELECTION

By Michael Vatikiotis and Ted Bardacke

Tha-Sala at dusk. The air cools as people gather on a football field beside the high school for a political rally a week before the election.

"Don't worry, folks, it never rains on a Democrat rally," said the warm-up man.

The organisers expected a crowd of 10,000. We had our doubts. A Sunday night in Southern Thailand. Wasn't there a good soap opera to watch at home? The large stage, and banks of slide and video projectors stacked behind it, looked ambitious — and expensive. The sound system turned our diaphragms into bass drums. "So this is how they spend that million baht," said Ted, referring to the laughably low legal limit for a candidate's war chest.

Political campaigns in southern Thailand were different from elsewhere in the country, we were told. People can't be bought — and they only vote for Southerners. "That's right," said a middle-aged teacher from the town of Sri Chon, thumping my knee in the way that they do down here in *Pak Tay* (the South). She and her husband drove 23 kilometres to attend the rally. "We southerners have to vote Democrat because if we don't have a Southerner in power, who will look after us?" Another thump to the ribs ruled out any disagreement on this point.

Politicians look for votes; reporters look for voters. It's a simple formula that sustains a mutually beneficial symbiosis between scribblers and politicians at election time everywhere. In this election, less than three years after the world's media hailed the middle class revolution on Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Bangkok's foreign press were also looking for issues to ask voters about. Finding precious few, we had to make do with a rehash of Thailand's unchanging political culture.

To escape the cynicism of the Bangkok taxi-driver, or the homespun "I vote for the one who is good to me"

logic of the Isaarn farmer, we opted to explore the South: bastion of Chuan Leekpai's Democrat Party and, if you believe the party hacks, the heartland of democracy in Thailand.

The early-bird flight to Nakhorn Sri Thammarat was prompt enough. The problem was how to get into town. No taxi. No limo service. Not even a terminal at which to ask for directions. Taxis are scarce in a part of Thailand where it seems that you either own a new-model Mercedes or a late 70s Honda 110 with sidecar. The gleaming new mini-bus advertising itself from the "Southern BM Hotel" was our only way off the sleepy airstrip.

Nice hotel in the center of town,

neighbouring country to the South.

As we pondered the five-star ambience, we heard the clump of expensive car doors and turned to see a phalanx of "wai"-ing blue suits and their body-guards being greeted at the door. So much for the grass-roots. After briefly considering the possibility that we had stumbled on a regional hood's convention, we decided on a down-market option in the centre of town.

One of the main problems covering up — or down — country Thailand is transport. Here in Nakhorn Sri Thammarat, we were told that people who don't own Mercedes use buses or motorcycles. Imagine our joy at finding a 25-year-old Mercedes for hire. We'd arrived.

Our mission: to discover the secrets of Chuan's popularity and the Democrat's success. In the last week of the campaign the party was hoping to win 46 seats in these 14 provinces. That's double what they expected to gain in any other region — and from the smallest region in the country at that.

We soon sensed that their chances were good. No one votes for anyone else around here, we were told over thick black local coffee next to the city mosque. "We vote for Chuan because he's a Southerner. You write that and say the monk at

Wat Maha That told you," said a nearly toothless old bonze at the foot of the ancient Chedi that houses a holy tooth of the Buddha.

With sentiment like that, it was surprising to come across the Nam Thai party headquarters planted firmly in the heart of town. "Oh well, they say they'll win. But you know their vote is declining," claimed a harassed-looking Nam Thai party worker. "We're campaigning for change," he said optimistically — adding that their candidate was rather well connected in the mayor's office.

True, you can't pay people for their vote down here, said the Nam Thai canvasser. "But the Democrats use money all the same."

Over in Tha-Sala, as the Democrat rally got going, it was hard to dispute



Photo by Michael Vatikiotis
The democratic faithful attending a political rally at Tha-Sala.

fresh coffee, and a phone plug for the modem; that's what we dreamed of on the 7-kilometre ride into town. Seven kilometres the other side, we pulled up at a brand new 400-room hotel that looked as if it had been beamed down from Singapore's Orchard Road. Plenty of Mercs; the Hondas were scarcer.

"Who built this?" wondered Ted, craning to take in the three-storey lobby with Sistine Chapel-esque cloud scenes painted above the three-tiered chandeliers. Later we learned that the hotel was built on a herbal toothpaste fortune — possibly with a little extra business on the side. "Does it matter? This is the place all the politicians stay for sure," I replied, drawing on extensive experience of comfortable coffee-shop politicking in a

this. To the theme tune from "The Last of the Mohicans," Chuan's achievements were presented to the gathered *chao baan* (villagers) in a kaleidoscopic whirl of computer-coordinated slide and video clips. Children posed with meter-long pin-ups of the Prime Minister. In thick southern dialect, one speaker after another urged the crowd to vote for Chuan. Chuan, the son of the soil; the saviour of Thai democracy.

"We don't have to give money, we're building the province," said local MP Surin Pitsuwan, giving as an example the planned four-lane highway between Surat Thani and Nakhorn Sri Thammarat. We agreed, it was a class act. Surin even mentioned that he had "brought farangs to Tha-Sala, to give a picture of your support to the world." Ted, supine on the cool grass after shooting some baskets with the local kids, and myself, weary after covering six hours of political speeches in a strange dialect, felt more useful than we had in hours; we had become part of the campaign.

Problem was, we still had not found our minor grail; the secret of the Democrat Party's support. We searched in the poorest town of the province, Chiang Yai. There we



Photo by Michael Vatikiotis
Muslim youths in Nakhorn Sri Thammarat.

found that even in their poverty, people there thought the Democrats were just fine. At a roadside funeral in Baan Tha Sakray, people interrupted their feasting and mourning to tell us the same thing — and feed us as well.

Finally, some time after midnight at Tha-Sala, we pinned down Surin. He narrowed it down to culture. "You'll never find a Chavalit or an Amnuay here in the South," he said referring to the leaders of the New Aspiration Party and Nam Thai. "People in the South are hard-headed, legalistic and individualistic." Different from other Thais? "Quite so, they believe in democratic values."

Later still, over hot sweet milk and Indian-style *roti*, Surin let loose his fierce appetite, while Ted and I pondered the cultural realities of the South: a proud people conscious of cultural affinities with their Malay neighbours and fearful of being left out of national affairs.

Surin almost had us convinced. Just then, at a little past 2 a.m., one of his canvassers sat down after distributing slate cards to some folks sipping tea nearby. "They thought we were Palang Dharma," she said wearily. "They wear the same white jackets as us."

Michael Vatikiotis, Correspondent Director of Programs, works for the Far Eastern Economic Review, and Ted Bardacke is a correspondent for the Financial Times.

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PRINTING SOLUTIONS

FCCT Journalism Awards

All FCCT members are of course aware of our Wednesday night programmes, cheap drinks on Fridays, feature movies on Mondays and documentaries on Saturdays. Lesser known, but equally important, are our efforts to help young journalists in the region develop their reporting skills. In fact, the FCCT has two annual journalism awards, one specifically for Thai journalism students and the other for young journalists in the region who may benefit from additional training.

The Orgibet Foundation FCCT Scholarship Fund



George Capps, Orgibet Foundation Coordinator, presents a scholarship to one of this year's winners.

The first award was initiated by the late Jorge Orgibet, one of the original founders of the FCCT. The Orgibet Foundation FCCT Scholarship Fund is used exclusively to assist deserving but needy Thai journalism students. It consists of two cash awards of Baht 7,500 each, plus an internship with a Bangkok-based, international news organisation.

It is customary to appoint one awardee from Chulalongkorn University and another from Thammasat University, to maintain the FCCT's neutrality between Bangkok's two most prestigious institutions of higher learning. The

club selects the winning candidates in May, and they are always invited to a Wednesday night programme, where they are introduced to club members and given the award. Over the years, many Thai students have benefited from the Orgibet award and subsequent training.

The 1994 awardees were Savitree Muadmuang of Thammasat University and Monthira Wirotanan of Chulalongkorn University. They were also given internships provided by Agence France Presse and Reuters, respectively. In May, the 1995 awards were given to Warangkana Wanichachewa of Chulalongkorn and Jintana Maksin of Thammasat. They are still waiting for their internships to be announced.

It is worth noting that since the establishment of the Orgibet award in 1988, 15 of 16 awardees have been women. This reflects the much keener interest in journalism among young Thai females than males, who seem to prefer careers in banking or private business.

This is in sharp contrast to the FCCT's other award, the Davis-Latch Memorial Fund, which was set up in honour of two Bangkok-based television journalists killed while covering an abortive coup attempt in 1985. All nine recipients (two winners in 1995) of this award have been male journalists:

Davis-Latch Memorial Fund

1987: Sinfah Tunsarawuth, *The Nation*, Thailand

1988: S. Jayakrishnan, *New Straits Times*, Malaysia

1989: Sichendra Bahadur Bista, *Naya Samaj*, United News of India, Nepal

1990: Horacio G. Saverino, *Manila Chronicle*, the Philippines

1991: Nguyen Ngoc Troung, *Quan He Quoc Te* (World Affairs) magazine, Vietnam

1992: (No award)

1993: Tashi Phuntsho, *Kuensel*, Bhutan

1994: Ker Munthit, *Phnom Penh*

Post, Cambodia

1995: Vansay Tavinyane, Lao National Radio, Laos.

Thanormsy Phommavong, *Vientiane Mai* newspaper.



Ker Munthit (right) of the Phnom Penh Post receives the Davis/Latch award from FCCT President Panadda Lertlum-Ampai during the annual ball.

Much more money is available for the Davis-Latch memorial award; usually 70,000 to 80,000 baht. This is because awardees have to be flown in from neighbouring countries and put up in Bangkok hotels. *The Bangkok Post*, *The Nation* and *Pujadkarn* have provided internships for the awardees. Some past winners were sent to Hong Kong at the FCCT's expense to continue their internships with regional publications such as *Asiaweek*, the *Asian Wall Street Journal* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

While the Orgibet award benefits needy journalism students, the thought behind the Davis-Latch award is to provide professional journalists in the region with in-house training at some of Asia's leading publications. A major goal is to promote the exchange of ideas.

The FCCT is proud to be part of the effort to develop Bangkok into a regional press centre. Our yearly awards also reflect our dedication to a free press and freedom of expression. No where else in Asia are such fundamental civil rights more respected than in Thailand.

— Bertil Lintner

Cambodian Viewpoint

THE THAI PRESS- FINE LINE BETWEEN USE AND ABUSE

By Ker Munthit

Visiting Cambodian journalist Ker Munthit views the Thai media through a magnifying glass.

Earlier this year, the monk Phra Yantra sex scandal captured headlines in the Thai press. After that, the mass-circulation daily *Thai Rath* unfolded the Phuket land reform controversy and by doing so, challenged other news media to also pursue the story. The political scandal heated up, and the government of then Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai was defeated by a no-confidence vote, leading to the dissolution of Parliament and the announcement of a new election July 2.

Although Thailand is often praised for permitting more press freedom than other countries in Southeast Asia, aggressive media coverage of headline-grabbing stories such as the Phra Yantra sex scandal and the Phuket land reform case has triggered debate. Media critics say the press has abused its privilege, sensationalizing stories just to sell papers. Others argue press freedom and the public's right to know.

There is a fine line between the use and abuse of press freedom, said Professor Sukanya Sudbanthad of the Faculty of Communications at Chulalongkorn University. "I think it is true that the Thai media has a large portion of freedom, except that they have to maintain some responsibility for what they write. And this has become a question for the Thai press today," the professor said.

Kwankhauw Tipayawan, an environmental reporter of *Pujadkarn* newspaper, said that in the land reform case, the media fulfilled its duty to inform the public which has the right to know the truth. The truth, she insisted, is that Chuan's government mishandled the land reform; beneficiaries of the reform were found to be the rich — including relatives of politicians — instead of poor farmers.

"It is freedom of the press and the people," Kwankhauw said. "People

must be informed about wrongdoings of the government. They wonder why the rich also get more land under the reform. It is not fair," she said.

Bangkok alone is informed and entertained by some 40 daily and non-daily publications, more than 40 FM and more than 100 AM radio stations, and five television stations. There seems to be no shortage of information.

There was an attempt a few years ago to form a press council with the task of formulating some sort of self-censorship for Thai journalists. Such a council never came to light due to opposition within the Thai media. Many believed that imposing self-censorship is too harsh a measure and infringes on press freedom. Self-censorship would have been no different from a government censorship law, they argued.

With a daily circulation of 50,000, *Pujadkarn* is considered the leading business newspaper in Thailand. About 70 percent of its sales target Bangkok.

Pujadkarn editor Khunthong Lawserivanich says it is hard to say what would make journalists more accountable. Although he strongly believes in the public's right to know — a basic foundation for press freedom — he said there is no definite way of shaping journalists' conduct. But he agreed that once journalists have press freedom, they must be willing to regulate themselves.

"Mostly, it depends on the journalists' and editors' own judgment," he said. "We don't know the reaction until the stories come out. It's not a good thing to do, but you don't have enough time to check all sources," Khunthong said.

A Thai Foreign Ministry official who asked not to be identified said regulation of media performance in Thailand is accomplished through market mechanisms.

"We just let them grow," he said of the overwhelming number of

newspapers, radio and television stations in Thailand. "The moment they grow, they fight each other because competition comes along. You can't be bad all the time, because then people will go to another newspaper. So, they will check and balance."

"There is freedom (of the press) yes, in the Philippines, but unruly. The same thing in India," the official said, acknowledging that not all Thai journalists adhere to discipline 100 percent.

A responsible press is especially important, given that increasingly, people believe the Thai media is becoming an influential force in the country.

Uboirat Siviyausak, Professor of Mass Communications at Chulalongkorn University, questioned the performance of the Thai media when she addressed an FCCT seminar in May. Her remark reported by the *Thailand Times* on May 30 was that the Thai media is becoming the vehicle of political parties and as a result is losing the ability to objectively cover the news and accurately reflect the real public mood of the country.

Referring to the land scandal coverage, she said the media prefers to concentrate on issues that converge with the interests of the political parties, since these issues are the vehicles to power and thus the means to greater influence and economic gain for the media. The media, she was quoted as saying, instead of reflecting the public mood, created "alliances" with opposition political parties and helped them create a public mood over the land scandal. However, the public reaction existed only in Bangkok and not in the countryside, she said.

Professor Sukanya Sudbanthad of Chulalongkorn praised the Thai press, especially the print media, for doing a good job investigating the misconduct of monk Phra Yantra. Many Thai journalists interviewed by

...THAI PRESS continued on page 18

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Cambodian Viewpoint

BY KER MUNTHIT

...THAI PRESS continued from page 15
the writer agreed with her.

The professor said that investigative reporting is becoming a professional focus for Thai journalists. As a result, she believes that by further developing investigative reporting, the press will become more dynamic and influential in shaping the policy of the Thai government.

However, she said headlines in most Thai-language newspapers tend to be subjective and sensational. Sometimes headlines are even misleading and do not reflect the facts in the stories.

"These days, the press, especially the print media, has been criticized on this subject," she said. "The criticism from the public is that the Thai press is not responsible in the way they would like to see."

As for the Thai journalists, she went on to say, being given more professional respect has made them more proud of their work. But they still do not like self-criticism.

Neither have they fully addressed the issue of professional ethics. In his book *Groping for Ethics in Journalism*, American journalism professor H. Eugene Goodwin raised conflict of interest issues that often confront

journalists. According to him, efforts by public officials, politicians and other VIPs to influence or at least gain favor with journalists through "gifts" and free food and drink continue to be a problem. The cause, as he pointed out, is economic.

In Thailand, as journalists become more economically self-sufficient, accepting bribes is not as rampant as before, but some observers believe the practice still thrives.

Khunthong Lawserivanich of Pujadkarn said the problem continues to exist between journalists and news sources in many subtle ways.

"If you are a big businessman bidding a mega project from the government, you want a columnist to write in a positive way about you," Khunthong said. "Of course, they don't give (gifts) in front of other people's eyes. They don't want anything from you now, but you will understand what is your obligation."

"It's a kind of bribery to hospitality," he said. "It's very bad for journalists as it affects very much their neutrality and accountability."

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior Thai journalist said the problem stems from simple greed. Journalists who accept gifts from donor companies or politicians

can often afford to buy the gifts themselves, she said. But "they have a corruption habit."

Professor Sukanya said such practice may also exist among "powerful columnists." However, she said that in general journalists have become more cautious and are aware that accepting gifts may have an impact on their reporting.

Most Thai journalists cannot be easily bribed these days, she said. "Many of them are rich. Their salary is even higher than that of teachers." Beginning journalists receive 8,000 to 10,000 baht per month, she said.

"They feel guilty if they accept gifts from a company," she said, adding that increasingly, journalists are developing a sense of professional responsibility. "I am optimistic about journalists in Thailand."

Ker Munthit, a reporter for the *Phnom Penh Post*, is the 1995 recipient of the FCCT's Davis/Latch award. Munthit, 32, recently worked with editors at the *Bangkok Post* and Pujadkarn as part of his Davis/Latch internship. He studied in Moscow for six years and is fluent in Cambodian, English and Russian.

The government has sentenced several journalists to jail. Three others have been killed, but their assassins unjustly still enjoy freedom. The government's press bill containing harsh penalties is waiting to be hammered out by the National Assembly. With that bill, the government is hoping to prevent further gunning-down of journalists. It also hopes that all disputes will be solved in a lawful manner.

However, that still sounds ridiculous, given the ubiquity of guns in Cambodia.

As for the journalists, their version of press freedom always results in prejudice and resentment, especially from government officials. Many

Khmer newspapers have failed to provide their audience with objective, accurate news reporting. By using vulgar words in articles, they have also failed to help educate readers, especially youths. Facts and opinions are always mixed together, with many journalists assuming that what they

say is believed by the public. Apparently, economic factors influence some journalists' sense of responsibility and impartiality. Many newspapers are believed to be financially backed by different political parties.

"Press freedom" appears to be an

American donut given to Cambodian journalists, but no one seems to know how to eat it properly. Rather than being united to fight the government's pressure, journalists are more politically factionalized. In all, there seems to be more press anarchy than press freedom.



EXPLORING BANGKOK

By Ker Munthit



"Welcome to Thailand! Thailand Phrajathipatay. Good. Understand?" said Sak the taxi driver.

If you don't get it, no worries, but you can guess the meaning. It seemed Sak had so many things he wanted to tell me. What I clearly understood was his asking me if I wanted to visit Bangkok's go-go girls, because at one point during the ride he mentioned Patpong. He tried to assure me that his English was bad, but it wasn't as bad as my knowledge of Thai.

I had 90 minutes to get to the Bangkok Post building on Na Ranong Road near the Port Authority. I thought I had plenty of time.

According to a city map the road stretches from an intersection of the southbound expressway to the Chao Phraya River. The Post building is located in the Klong Toey area, about which I really had no clue. From somewhere near Victory Monument I hopped on one of Bangkok's famous mass transportation vehicles, public bus #47, which a Thai pedestrian told me would take me to my destination.

In the bus, all my attention was focused on spotting Na Ranong Road. I felt I was being watched by other passengers because of my anxiousness. The Klong Toey market came into view, but the bus kept rolling on, past where I wanted to go. I eventually managed to jump off.

Welcome to the Port Authority of Thailand. Seven taxi drivers I asked didn't know where Na Ranong Road

is, but the eighth did. Finally I got to the Bangkok Post building. My watch indicated ten minutes to 4 pm. I was 50 minutes late to the meeting. The trip had taken nearly two and half hours.

The taxi driver confidently nodded his head when I told him I wanted to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I trusted him. From Phra Athit Road where I had just visited the office of Pujadkarn newspaper, he drove across the madness of Bangkok traffic. He gave me a little sightseeing trip by driving past the Royal Palace. While we were sitting in the middle of a traffic jam, he raised both palms to his head to pay homage to a statue of a man on a horse. It was King Chulalongkorn.

He turned left onto a street with construction work going on in the middle and pulled over. He said something to me in Thai. I presumed he said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and handed him 100 baht and got out.

The sign at the gate said "Passport Section." A security guard told me I was at the wrong place, so I had to spend another 80 baht to get to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is located near Wat Phra Keow. I arrived just seven minutes before the scheduled meeting.

After the meeting, I made no more mistakes in choosing the exact bus that would take me back to Victory Monument. I had to make sure which way I had to go, right or left,

but I had lost my sense of direction.

I jumped on an air-conditioned bus #39 at the corner of Thammasat University. I told the conductor in English that I wanted to go to Victory Monument and handed her a 20-baht banknote. A man sitting behind me asked me where I came from. With his quite understandable English, Captain Mongkol enthusiastically told me he used to work with CRCC (which perhaps stands for Cambodian Refugees Coordination Center.)

I started a happy chat with Capt. Mongkol. He recalled the good times he had in Cambodia but said the inadequate electricity supply there annoyed him. His enthusiasm about seeing me — although we had never met before — prompted him to speak loudly, and his voice was heard throughout the bus. A middle-aged lady sitting next to him apparently lost her patience with the Captain's voice and moved to another seat.

"In Cambodia, people are very good, but leaders..." Capt. Mongkol said, gesturing with his fingers as if counting cash, followed by holding his hand with the thumb down. I told him, "You're absolutely right, Captain."

At this moment, the bus conductor turned to me again for another eight baht in addition to the 20 baht from which I had not yet received change. As the conductor and I argued about the fare, both of us raised our voices. Everyone was watching me. Frustrated, I paid another eight baht

.....EXPLORE continued on page 25

JOURNALISM CAMBODIAN STYLE

By Ker Munthit



The author lunching at the Bangkok Post cafeteria during his internship at the paper.

Like Thai journalists, Cambodian journalists have subscribed to the concept of freedom of expression, which along with a free press and respect for human rights, are main ingredients for democratic liberalization of a regime. All three are stipulated in Cambodia's constitution.

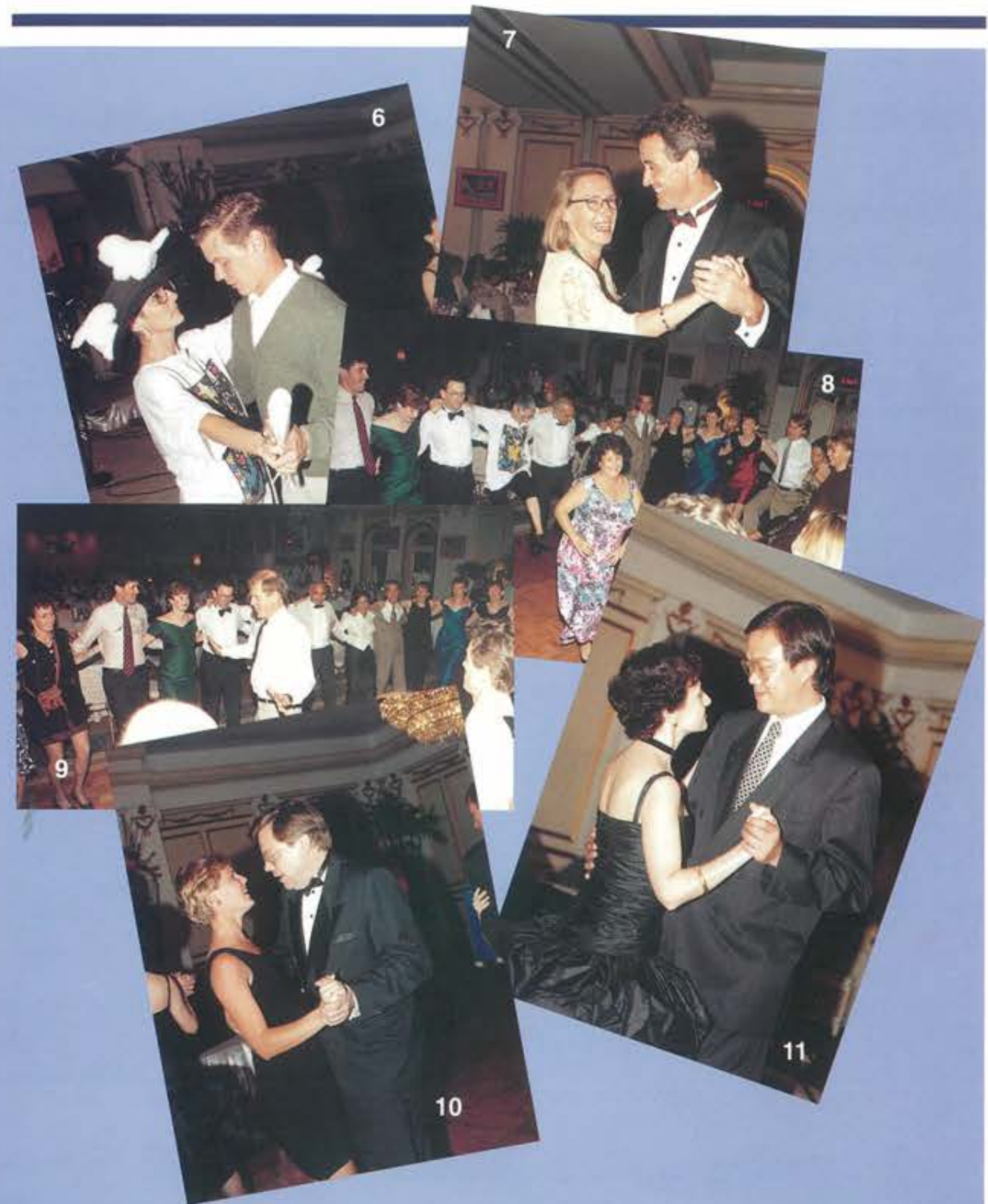
Sadly, those freedoms have become desperate vis-a-vis, on the one hand, the government's readiness to suppress the media, and on the other, the media's continued abuses of those freedoms.

Club Highlights



DRESSING UP. The theme of the 1995 Ball was Tintin, reporter hero of the popular Belgian comic strip "Les Aventures Extraordinaires de Tintin et Milou," by cartoonist Hergé. Many FCCT members and guests got into the spirit of the costume party by showing up as their favorite Tintin character. There were plenty of Tintins with the trademark curl in the hair, Tintin's dog Snowy, explorers, Arab ladies and gents, and even the lovable, bumbling inspectors Thomson and Thompson (Dupond and Dupont in the French version). But it was little Saeng Tai Lintner, daughter of Immediate Past President Bertil Lintner, who snatched the top prize for best costume. Saeng Tai is pictured above in photo #4 chatting with Associate Director of Membership Whitney Small (first from left), while her mother, Hseng Nong Lintner (middle), looks on.

1995 Annual Ball



DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY. The party revved up a notch as guests took to the dance floor. Some waltzed one on one while others joined in a group rumba. Among the fleet-footed were Master and Mistress of Ceremony Gordon Fairclough and Jennifer Gambell (Photo #6), Recording Secretary Christine Cuff and former FCCT head honcho Bertil Lintner (Photo #10), and Treasurer Domenica Plantedosi with then Government Spokesman Akapol Sorasuchart (Photo #11).

1995 Annual Ball



HONORS AND PRIZES. At the ball the FCCT presented a plaque of appreciation to

Dumras Rodjanapiches, a tireless club volunteer. Khun Dumras is the one who selects and locates movie videos for Monday movie nights. He also stocks the clubhouse with international magazines and newspapers which airline cleaning crews collect for him, and he drives out to Chatuchak Market every weekend in search of additional foreign periodicals for the club.

Among the major prize winners were Daniel Pruzin (Photo #14), who won a 17,000 baht heart-shaped diamond ring donated by the Jewelry Trade Center, and Michelle Zack (photo #15), who won two round-trip tickets to London on Thai Airways International. Photo shows Wilai Wonggonworawade, public relations manager for the airline, (first from left) shaking hands with Ms. Zack while FCCT Assistant Manager Panjavilai A-Song-Im (second from left) and FCCT President Panadda Lertlum-Ampai (in glasses) look on.

Club Highlights

NEWS BRIEFS

WORK STARTS ON NEW CLUBHOUSE.

Utopia, the general contractor on the clubhouse project, began work June 27 and is scheduled to finish on August 24. The FCCT will move out of the Dusit Thani Sept. 10, and the club will officially open at its new location at the Jewelry Trade Center the following Monday.



NEW LIFE MEMBERS. Six individuals have signed on as life members, taking advantage of a 14-week grace period before July 1, when the cost of life memberships jumped from 45,000 baht to 75,000 baht. The FCCT Board approved the price increase in March. The new fee covers membership for the applicant and spouse.

BANGKOK SERVICE FOR DAVIS AND LATCH.

On Sept. 9 at 10:30 am there will be a memorial service at Wat Thata Thong (between Sukhumvit Soi 63 and 65) in honor of former FCCT members Neil Davis and Bill Latch, who were killed in 1985 while covering an abortive coup in Bangkok. Some friends and colleagues of the two men are also organizing a reunion in Phnom Penh in their memory. For information on the Cambodian reunion, please call Rodney Tasker of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* at 251-1139.

THE FCCT AT 40. The FCCT will turn 40 next year and to mark the occasion, the club is launching a 40th Anniversary Appeal. The club hopes to raise 10 million baht which will be used to complete the new clubhouse and expand services and activities for members. Please watch for more details.

PEOPLE

Peter Eng is back in town. After completing a 9-month Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University, Peter has returned to his editing duties at the Associated Press.



Lee Siew Hua, correspondent for *The Straits Times* of Singapore, has joined the FCCT Board as Director of Membership. She moved to Bangkok, her first foreign assignment, last year.

FCCT Life Member and club stalwart Suk Soongswang, owner of DK Book House and Suk's Wine Club, recently opened his fourth Suk's Wine Club at the Jewelry Trade Center.

John Twigg, Advertising and Marketing Consultant for *Bangkok Metro Magazine*, recently wed the magazine's General Manager Munintra Saengsuwimol. Twigg, a New Zealander who moved to Thailand in 1988, used to handle the production of *Dateline*. Congratulations!



All members are invited to submit announcements of new jobs or assignments to *Dateline Bangkok's* people. Please fax announcements to 260-2643.



BOOK LAUNCHES at the club have been quite popular. Above, at the book launch for Jim Eckardt's *Boat People*, the author (seated left) and moderator Collin Piprell (seated right) field questions from the audience. Below, Managing Director of Cruaasia Colin Paul and his daughter Alyssa, 5, pose for a photo with members of the FCCT bar staff during the book launch.



Reunion in Vietnam

TWO DECADES PLUS, VIETNAM WAR CORRESPONDENTS RETURN

By Edith M. Lederer and Denis D. Gray

The tiny elevator nicknamed "the flying coffin" was a pile of rubble. So our intrepid group started climbing the dark, broken stairs. Just as we reached Apartment 422 — the old Associated Press (AP) office — a huge thunderclap broke the eerie silence. The heavens opened, lashing the Eden Building but not washing away decades of grime.

The timing of the storm spooked all of us — veteran AP reporters and photographers during the Vietnam War.

Was it a sign of anger that AP was forced to close the office shortly after the Americans lost the war in 1975? Was it a sign that somebody up there remembered the anguish of the war, especially our colleagues who died in combat?

"It sort of hits you what happened — how the war ended," said Jurate Kazickas, who freelanced for AP in Vietnam, where she was wounded at the battle of Khe Sanh, and then joined AP in New York. "There were ghosts there. The angels were crying."

Twenty years after the fall of Saigon, we were the AP contingent among nearly 50 media veterans of the war returned to the city which moulded many of our lives. It was a time to rekindle old friendships, to remember absent friends, to search out old haunts, and to watch a newly capitalist Vietnam racing to become an Asian tiger. And we also had a couple of very good nights on the town.

The AP had the largest contingent — 14 stringers and staffers — and Americans were in the majority. But there was also Christine Spengler, now a well-known French freelance photographer, Colin Smith of the *London Observer*, Hong Kong-based Dutchman Hugh van Es (the one who took the evacuation helicopter-on-the-rooftop classic) and ex-Australian Broadcasting Corporation reporter Peter Everett.

Most had stayed on in the profession, some achieving superstar status, like Peter Arnett of CNN who won a Pulitzer in Vietnam but only became a household name after his

stay-behind reporting in Baghdad during the Gulf War. Others had drifted into other jobs. AP photographer and reporter Carl Robinson hung up his safari suit to become the (wealthy, it is said) owner of a Sydney restaurant, called, not surprisingly, "Old Saigon."

But all who came — from London, Paris, New York, Bangkok, Tokyo and other points around the globe — shared the perhaps clichéd, but nonetheless very real bonds forged by men and women who work, laugh and sometimes suffer together in times of conflict.

Unlike old high school reunions,

Pulitzer for photography in Vietnam, tracked down several of AP's Vietnamese staffers.

"The most important thing was to find so many of our former Vietnamese colleagues — not necessarily in good circumstances, but at least alive and looking forward rather than backward," he said. "None of them is permitted to do any press work today."

Sadly, we learned that a number of others had died, among them Le Hung, a radiophoto operator for 12 years, Nguyen Van Tam, who typed out the last AP dispatch from Vietnam, and Tran Trong Hung, who



BACK AT THE REX: Veteran war journalists attending the reunion gathered for a group photo atop the Rex Hotel, which was the former American officer's quarter and site of "Five O'Clock Follies," — U.S. military briefings during the war. (Front row, left to right: Colin Smith of the *Observer*, Edie Lederer of the Associated Press, retired British journalist and journalism legend Donald Wise, photographer Tim Page, and photographer Al Rockoff of "Killing Fields" fame. Al is the one who tried frantically, but unsuccessfully, to develop a photo of Dith Pran for Pran's fake French passport.

there were no faked emotions or false nostalgia here. And while we downed our share of "33s" and Tigers, nobody felt an urge to overdo the booze: it would somehow have felt disrespectful to colleagues who couldn't make it because their lives had been cut all too short several decades earlier.

While it was a reunion of Western journalists, we sought out the few remaining Vietnamese colleagues in Saigon. Horst Faas, who won his first

was overnight news editor during the last years of the war and later ran an antiquarian bookshop.

One night, Faas arranged a dinner and three Vietnamese staffers joined us for an evening of reminiscing — photographer and darkroom technician Le Ngoc Cung, technician and office boy Dang Van Huan and teletype operator Nguyen Van Tinh. Faas also met photo stringer Van Muoi, now 76.

By coincidence, the Freedom Forum

sponsored a panel on "The U.S. Media and Vietnam" during the reunion. Old battles (Did the press lose the war? Did we focus too much on the Americans and not enough on the Vietnamese? etc.) were refought, and a younger crop of journalists based in Vietnam offered perspectives on the country today.

Arnett said that Vietnam remained "a blinding, searing experience of the American psyche," and the younger reporters said that despite their desire to cover current developments many of their editors still viewed the country through the prism of the war.

American TV veteran Bernard Kalb, who chaired the discussion, asked for a moment of silence in memory of more than 300 journalists from all sides killed in Indochina's modern wars.

That was the only formal event of the reunion. Most nights we met for drinks at the hotel hospitality suite (before it turned into a karaoke parlor) and then headed out for dinner together. We took a dinner cruise down the Saigon River, once



OLD FRIENDS: Denis Gray gives Edith Lederer a friendly hug during a reunion dinner.



A cheerful gathering of former colleagues, from various news reporting agencies.

sniper alley. Some of us went to the Cu Chi Tunnels to try out the Viet Cong infiltration route (tiny and claustrophobic). Others travelled up Highway 1, the old Highway of Death.

"I pinch myself three or four times a day that I'm back here," said restaurateur Robinson. "For me, it's like the best thing I've done in 20 years."

And our AP bunch decided to go to the Eden Building, which now overlooks a large statue of Ho Chi Minh, to see what had happened to our office.

Led by Robinson and former Saigon bureau chief Richard Pyle, we walked down the long third floor corridor past startled Vietnamese. The humid air reeked of sweat, excrement, and nuoc mam, Vietnam's nam plaa (fish sauce).

Then, we climbed up the back staircase to the fourth floor where an elderly couple were sleeping on mats

in the corridor outside the old office, their conical hats covering their faces.

As the heavens thundered, Pyle and Robinson knocked on the door. Nobody answered. The old lady sat up as we walked away and Robinson's Vietnamese wife, Kim, asked her whether anyone lived in the apartment. She said a family lived there.

Arnett later recalled that at the end of the war scores of people tried to force their way into the AP office because they thought it would give them diplomatic immunity.

"We kept telling them 'no way,'" he said. "They stayed for days. Maybe they're still there from that time 20 years ago."

Edith Lederer was in Vietnam 1972-73 covering the war for the Associated Press. She now works for the AP in London.

Denis Gray, AP bureau chief in Bangkok, covered the war from 1973 to 1975.

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at her insistence.

However, a few minutes later she came up to me and handed over 20 baht with a look of apology. I guess she remembered me giving her the money at the beginning or somebody

else who witnessed the fact told her to do so. Capt. Mongkol and I exchanged telephone numbers and said good-bye at Victory Monument.

After facing all these experiences, I feel embarrassed about not being able

to communicate with Thais, whose language has so many similarities with my mother tongue. My inability to speak Thai was why I got lost so easily. After I return to Cambodia, I'm going to sign up for a Thai class.

Letter from Laos

By Paul Ryan

Vientiane, Laos.
May 22 to June 1



Paul Ryan

Arrived in this sleepy backwater on Monday, May 22nd, on a morning flight from Bangkok. It was hot. In this land of a million elephants, there was not a single one about. And most turtles were tucked in the coolness of their shells. Only a couple of lizards on the wall beyond the passport control officer gave me the evil eye.

(At the Lani 1 Guest House), I was shown to a large nondescript room on the second floor of what in days gone by might have been the home of a reasonably wealthy French colonial merchant. After unpacking, I asked for directions to the *(Vientiane) Times* and found it to be within walking distance.

There I met the editor, Michel Drouot, a suave French-Lao of indeterminable age, perhaps late 40 something, whom time has been kind to. In addition to his duties as editor of the weekly, he recently served as Adjunct General Director of Lao Radio and Television, which falls under the Ministry of Culture and Information, but has now relinquished these duties because of time constraints.

He was amused by my Knight International Press cap. KIP is, of course, the name of the local currency....

Drouot immediately pressed me into service editing material from Khao Sane Pathet Lao, the government news agency, mostly about provincial happenings. Steve

Offner, an Australian who works at the paper as part of his country's volunteer aid effort, was off somewhere seeing to the last-minute shopping needs of a friend who has been visiting this capital for the last 10 days. She is a reporter named Ashley who works for a large magazine in Sydney.

Offner, Drouot (whose Lao name is Somsanouk Mixay) and Deputy Editor Savankhane Razmouny, the party functionary, are the guts of the *Vientiane Times*, a weekly clearly aimed at foreign tourists and development interests. The paper began operations in April of 1994 with a press run of 2,000, but has now cut back to 1,000.

The paper has no reporters and thus no one to really train in basic reporting. The *Times* relies mainly on Offner and Drouot for local coverage of events. Three Lao women share office chores, including some layout tasks, as do a couple young Lao men, one of whom serves as a photographer. From time to time, there is an over the transom submission accepted, but no money changes hands. There are three computers jointly used for layout and editing purposes in the "newsroom," plus a printer. Pagemaker 4.0 is used for layout. Although a pirated copy of QuarkXpress exists in the system, there is not enough memory to operate it. A bigger hard drive is said to be on the way. The paper does not have a copier machine....

The week before my arrival there was a team of four Freedom Forum people in town and they conducted a workshop in basic journalism for about 20 Lao who work at local media outlets. Drouot said there were a total of about 65 reporters in the whole country, so the workshop got to approximately a third of them. Despite using translators, the Forum trainers' material was reportedly beyond the comprehension of most participants....

Wednesday I moved to L'Hotel Parasol Blanc, a charming establishment with a French menu that caters to visiting businessmen. My air-conditioned room is right opposite a small outdoor pool. There is thick trellised tropical foliage with

beautiful flowers and one can eat out on the patio or inside. It's nice to see pate on the menu again. And all this with a refrigerator and live music on the weekends at a very modest rate. The place is nearly full. The ambience is close to Riviera, though Lao modesty seems to preclude bikinis. Pity. No TV. One has to rely on short-wave radio for news....

After work one evening in an open patio bar overlooking the Mekong, as the sun set in a fiery red ball beyond our beer glasses, the expat talk at our table turned to conditions in the interior of the country. A Dutch cyclist making his way around the world commented that the road from Luang Prabang to Vientiane was risky and in many areas nearly impassable — Hmong insurgents labeled "bandits" by the government still attack buses even though they carry armed guards on the roof.

A grenade launcher was said to have taken out an entire bus load of people recently. And at least two died when the bus they were riding in was randomly sprayed by AK-47 fire from the ever-encroaching jungle.

The rockets themselves, fueled by the sulfur and gunpowder artistry of monks in the weeks leading up to the festival, are thought of as phalluses themselves..

Still, in contrast to Phnom Penh, Vientiane appears to be defenseless. I have noticed few soldiers about in my tuk-tuk travels about the city and only a handful of armed police, mainly in the market areas....

Sunday, May 28, was Rocket Day, known locally as Boun Bangfai, a fertility rite of phallic proportions. About eight of us expats, three women among us, took a tuk-tuk to the house of one of the Lao women who work on the *Times*. We were plied with substantial amounts of rice wine and a liquor that on other

.....LAOS continued on page 30

IMMF Update



SOLD BAHT 20,500

Nine-year old Kim Phuc running from napalm attack, Vietnam, 1972. Photo by Nick Ut.



SOLD BAHT 20,500

Khmer Rouge cadres in front of Angkor Wat, late 1970s. Photo by unknown Khmer Rouge photographer.

The Indochina Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF) held a second highly successful gala dinner/photo auction on January 24, 1995 at the Montien Hotel. Once again Tony Baynes of Coca Cola agreed to auction the photographs, all of which had been donated, and raised the magnificent sum of 530,000 baht.

The IMMF has made a special contribution of 125,000 baht to the photo restoration project at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Phnom Penh. Remaining funds are being used to maintain the activities of IMMF Thailand.

One upcoming IMMF project is an environmental reporting course in October for journalists from Indochina. The three-week course will be conducted at Chulalongkorn University and in Chiangmai district. Participants are all promising journalists in the region —

16 from Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and two from Thailand.

In Chiangmai they will study water and power issues, the impact of tourism on the environment, slash and burn agriculture and community forestry projects. The lead trainer will be Sara Colm, who also taught the first IMMF journalism course in 1994. Sara honed her training skills while working on the



SOLD BAHT 16,000

Young guerrilla, Phu Quoc Island, Cambodia, 1975. Photo by Bang Lam.



SOLD BAHT 16,500

Duc Ho Special Forces Camp, Vietnam, 1965. Photo by Tim Page.

Tristan Jones: Author, Sea Captain

1924 - 1995

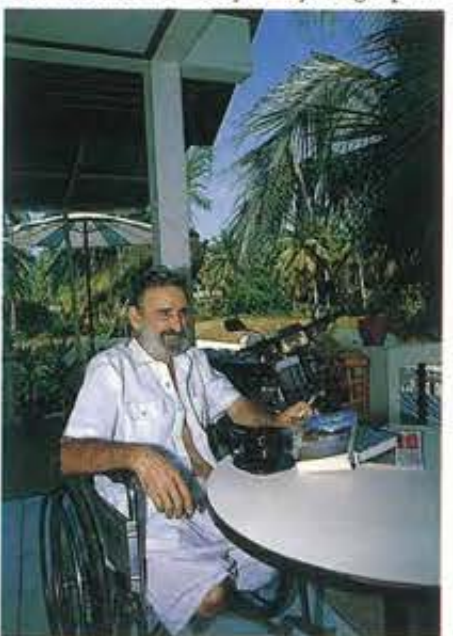
By Ellen Teper Lochaya

Phuket — Tristan Jones used to visit the FCCT in the late 80s — I remember reading his book *To Venture Further* at the club. I'd heard he was a gruff old curmudgeon so when I moved here and Bertil Lintner asked me to invite Tristan to an "author's night," I procrastinated — until Bertil showed up and I had no choice.

I don't remember how long we all talked but the man was fabulous, the most intelligent, witty mind I'd met in Phuket. That visit wasn't my last, though I regret I didn't go more often because Captain Tristan Jones, author of 17 marine adventure books, two novels and numerous short stories and articles, died of complications from a stroke on June 21st.

A fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Institute of Navigation, member of the Society of Authors, Jones was born May 8, 1924 on his father's ship, while sailing around Cape Horn. It was the start of a lifetime at sea with Tristan holding international records for single-handed sailing — a record 400,000 miles — four circumnavigations — and "vertical sailing" of both the world's highest body of water (Lake Titicaca, Andes) and the lowest (Dead Sea, Israel) as well as the Arctic Circle.

Raised in Wales, Jones was a member of the Royal Hydrographic



Service when his ship was blasted by a mine off Aden in 1952. Upon medical discharge, he began delivering yachts around the world until he could buy his own, recording his adventures in book after book. *The Wall Street Journal* said of *The Incredible Voyage* (1977), a journey in which he navigated 6,000 miles of uncharted rivers to reach open sea and capsized off the Cape of Good Hope, "full of comic interludes as well as harrowing ones...a unique chronicle."

Among his many books were *Ice!*, tales of a North Sea crossing that left him and his one-eyed, three-legged dog marooned in ice for 366 days (Sterling Hayden called it "an epic book written by such a glorious man"); *Adrift: Saga of a Wayward Sailor*, *Seagulls in My Soup*, and *A Steady Trade*.

In 1983, Jones lost his left leg due to shrapnel wound complications. He became an idol to millions of disabled people as he sailed around the world, writing *Outward Leg* (down the coast of Central America, across to the Caribbean and up to New York, then across the Atlantic—his 20th solo trip across it), *The Improbable Voyage* (on the rivers of Central Europe, including behind the Iron Curtain, blaring bagpipe music over the Danube) and *Somewhere East of Suez* (from the Mediterranean down the Suez Canal, across the Indian Ocean to Thailand, with Thomas Ettenhuber, a German mate.)

Tristan started Atlantis Enablement with his own funds, teaching disabled Thai youngsters boat building, navigation and sailing. With three of his "lads" and Thomas, Tristan piloted across the Isthmus of Kra, a feat never before accomplished. *To Venture Further* (1991), which he sent the club, records their trip including towing by an elephant across miles of dry driver bed and fighting off pirates in the gulf. "I want to show the world that disabled people can accomplish



almost anything they set their hearts on," he said. "I want them to feel proud of themselves, not let themselves be shunted aside, and to give them skills by which they can earn a living."

Three years ago, Jones' remaining leg developed gangrene and was amputated. It looked like his seafaring days were over, but he simply rigged a ramp to slide into the dinghy his "lads" had built and steered himself from Rawai to Chalong Bay. There, hoisted onto the *Gabriel*, he shared the helm with his captain, "Louie" Chokkeur.

Finally, he sold the *Gabriel* and bought a computer. He continued "working with his lads" but with a modem, Tristan took to sailing the Internet, shooting off his ubiquitous letters to Postbag and corresponding with friends by e-mail. When he died, he was awaiting publication of *Encounters*, due out this Fall, preparing a six-month lecture series for the University of London and had just learned his novel, *Aka*, was to be made into a movie. His autobiography sits on discs and he couldn't stop talking about Internet's book publishing potential. Tristan Jones, a master storyteller, couldn't spell "defeat."

His final voyage came on June 26, 1995 aboard the *Gabriel*, loaned for the occasion. His friends consigned his ashes, as per his instructions, "twelve miles offshore of Laem Prom Thep" in international waters, followed by "a bottle of good, dark rum," then drank their own toast to this valiant sailor — Captain Tristan Jones is back at sea.

Wandering Eye



Perhaps it would be better to spare the blushes of the distinguished Australian journalist who has been honoured with more than his fair share of professional writing awards. After his teenage daughter quizzed him on the Franco-Prussian War, he was inexplicably moved to put pen to paper and write an essay on her behalf.

Finely honed professional skills were brought effortlessly into play. The sequence of events was outlined with lucidity, historical perspective carefully balanced, choice quotes selected, and numerous 'writerly' touches added.

The finished masterpiece was duly submitted, only to be awarded seven out of ten. It was all the outraged hack could do to prevent himself marching off to see the teacher for an explanation of this casual justice. Doubtless there is a moral in this somewhere.

The FCCT's professional membership prides itself on incisive analysis of emerging democracies and competence to judge major business developments in the region. But normally this is done from a safe distance. Suddenly the Great Move West is upon us. In the best local tradition, the relocation of the clubhouse to the bottom of Silom Road has generated a rash of committees, subcommittees, chairmen, sudden transfers to inactive posts, memorandums of misunderstanding, assassinations by innuendo etc., etc. Few normal FCCT members — there are some — can

imagine the complexities surrounding the transfer of the Clubhouse from its dated present surroundings to a super modern location that will beam us all safely up into the 21st Century.

Endless hours have been devoted to discussions on whether the relocating mechanism should be called the Clubhouse Committee, the Clubhouse Relocation Committee, the New Clubhouse Committee, the Old Clubhouse & New Relocation Committee... Something revolutionary clearly had to be done.

In a bloodless coup late one Friday night following ample pots of ale, it was decided that the boring sounding Clubhouse Committee should really be called the Strict and Legal Organ for the Relocation of the Clubhouse. Not least for reasons of copyright, the FCCT Executive Committee was horrified and has not seen fit to give this committee, with its resonant acronym, any more publicity than is absolutely necessary.

However, it can be revealed exclusively in the pages of *Dateline* that the committee contains an ageing Strongman and Patron (Senior General Denis Gray) as well as Secretaries 1 & 2 (Major General Bertil Lintner and André 'Einstein' McNicoll) who attempt to keep the minutes. There is also a Prince of Evil whose name and rank cannot be revealed for reasons of national security but who likes the sobriquet; a

Minister of Communications (Marechal Philippe Decaux) because he is good at dishing out abuse; and a Minister of Finance ('Boss of Bosses' Domenica Piantedosi) because she is an Italian banker. The latter (who, as it happens, does not come from Sicily) is adamant that the FCCT can't even afford to buy new crockery. She dreams of the Prince of Evil frequently, but it is always in a recurring nightmare in which she pleads with him that he doesn't really need a budget for a small chrome motorbike on which to putter around the new premises.

As *Dateline* went to press, dark and totally unconfirmed rumours were afoot that a bungalow was being readied along a bleak far shore of Lumpini Lake. If the press weren't so tightly controlled under the present regime, so much more could be invented...

It is learned that First Vice President Margo Towie has gone a full three months without even a mild altercation on her way back from the airport. In fact, absolutely nobody in the vicinity has been thumped. This can probably be attributed to simple exhaustion following an enforced decision to vacate her Thonburi mansion set amidst luxuriant orchards in favour of a small and central bachelor pad. Since the move, Margo has been out on the town



Wandering Eye

every night in diaphanous gowns dancing into the wee small hours. Interestingly, Wandering Eye has received no reports as yet of bruised nightclub bouncers making her acquaintance along the way...

There is great relief all round that Club Manager Eric Brighton has fully recovered from a mild heart attack suffered in the pool of the Polo Club. Few members realise that Eric has actually swum to the moon and back about eight times without ever leaving Bangkok. Anyway, on that fateful day Eric realised that all was not quite as it should be when he began to sink like a stone as he was completing his 20th kilometre. Eric managed to get himself to the side of the pool to regain his composure, and after a few minutes hauled himself up on the edge. As he was sitting there pondering his next move, an FCCT member came bowling up. "Eric, do you think this move down Silom is really such a good idea?" he demanded. Most of us would probably have said something like, "Could this wait till Monday. I'm a little tied up at the moment." Not Eric. Professional to a fault, incredibly loyal, British and so forth, he

proceeded to recite the countless benefits to be enjoyed at the Jewelry Trade Center. Only when the member was fully satisfied did Eric discreetly cart himself off to the ICU at the Bangkok Nursing Home.

The FCCT's Hugh Grant of the Year Award goes to a distinguished member of the Club who rang up a colleague and let drop conversationally, "I hear your boyfriend got married last week." There followed a stunned silence in which the Village Gossip felt more like the Village Idiot. Somehow, he belatedly surmised that the boyfriend in question had not been quite such an 'ex' after all. "That wouldn't surprise me," came the admirably measured hiss down the line. The now decidedly ex was immediately called and confronted with his deceit. "I didn't want to hurt your feelings, darling," he burred. "It's not the Asian Way." Then again, maybe it is.

André McNicoll has been doing all he can to raise standards at the FCCT. Never one for purple prose, he heads up the International Institute of Communicative Sciences, or whatever, which is rumoured to

have offices in Ottawa, Leipzig and, logically enough, Bangkok. This is of course all part of a grand masterplan. Once the new FCCT Clubhouse is completed with Andre's help, Bangkok will be able to claim its rightful place as centre of the universe. The rest of the world will be relegated to mere mailboxes on the Internet. But back to the tale. Andre's peace was rudely shattered recently by a neighbour virtually breaking down the door and demanding an introduction. Introduction to whom? Albert Einstein, of course. Proof, as if were needed, that Albert was lurking within the hallowed portals of Andre's institute was there for all to see on a neatly typed envelope addressed to Albert Einstein c/o Chez Andre. The neighbour was curtly told that Albert could probably be found having a quick snifter at the Crown Royal at that time of day. Only days later did the reason for the confusion dawn on our hero. On the flip side of Andre's business card is a quote properly attributed to, yes, Albert Einstein.

...LAOS continued from page 26

occasions might fuel a rocket. Several Lao men were sitting around a table drinking this concoction in preparation for their role as women in a procession to the "launching site." A homemade rocket had been prepared for the occasion....

In a show of faith that the rockets would indeed bring rain for the harvest, the purpose of the festival, I carried an umbrella newly bought this day at the morning market. It turned out to be very useful for shade in the blistering sun as we waited in the field along with several thousand others for the rockets to fire....

Some participants actually carried wooden phalluses painted bright red and turtles, the symbol of the female sex here. The rockets themselves, fueled by the sulfur and gunpowder artistry of monks in the weeks leading up to the festival, are thought of as

phalluses themselves, thrusting into the sky where they penetrate the heavens, generating rain and fertility.

Late in the day, after all the thrusting and penetrating, it did sprinkle a little, but hardly what I would call a cloudburst orgasm. Prizes were given for the rockets that travelled the furthest based on their size and weight.

Paul Ryan is an American journalist who spent two years in China working as an adviser on the China Daily in Beijing and the Shanghai Star. He has been assigned to the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF) by the Knight International Press Fellowship organization to assist with IMMF projects in Indochina. Under the one-year fellowship, Paul recently shared his expertise with newspapers in Laos and Vietnam.

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