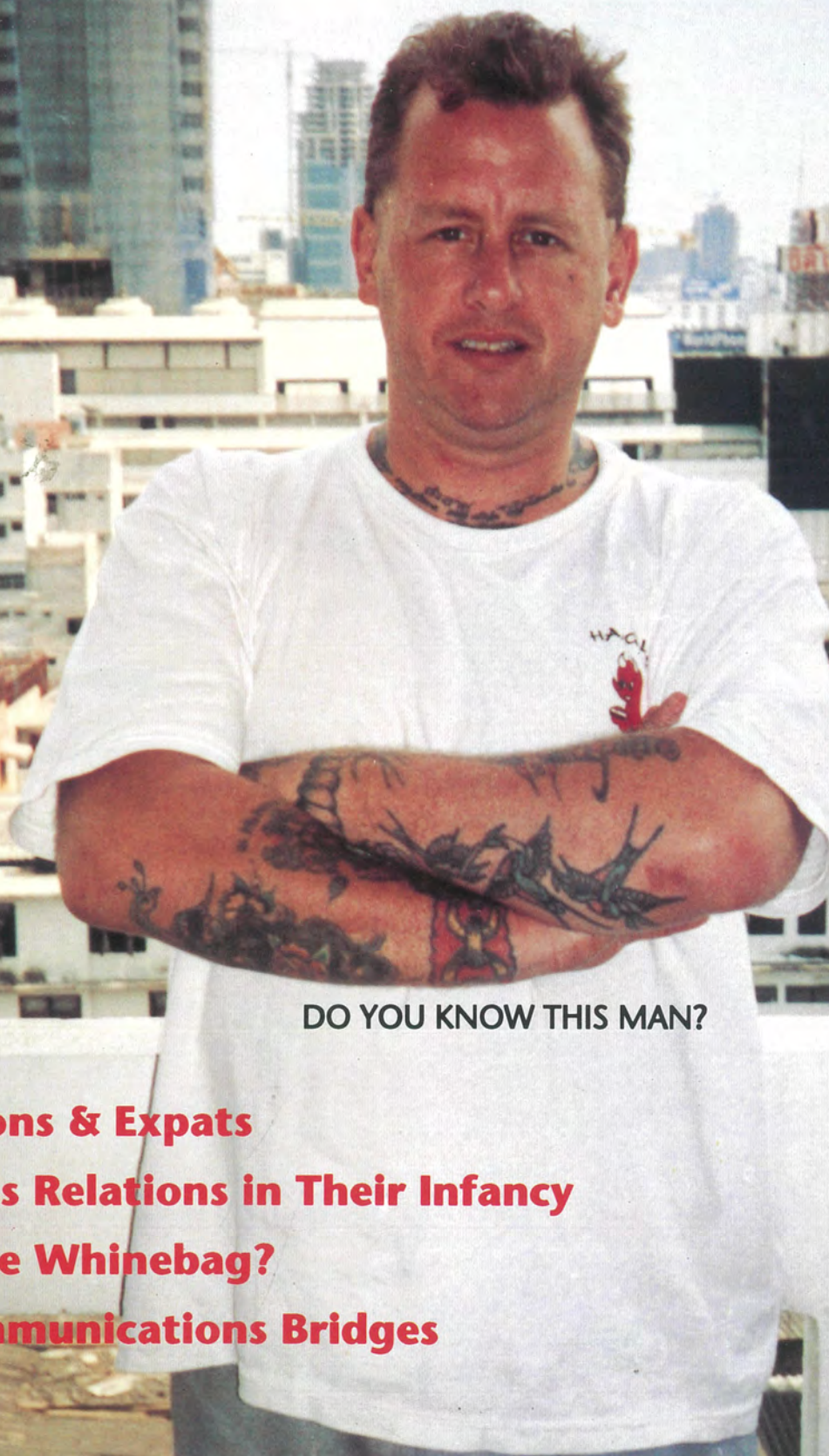


The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine

Third Quarter 1994

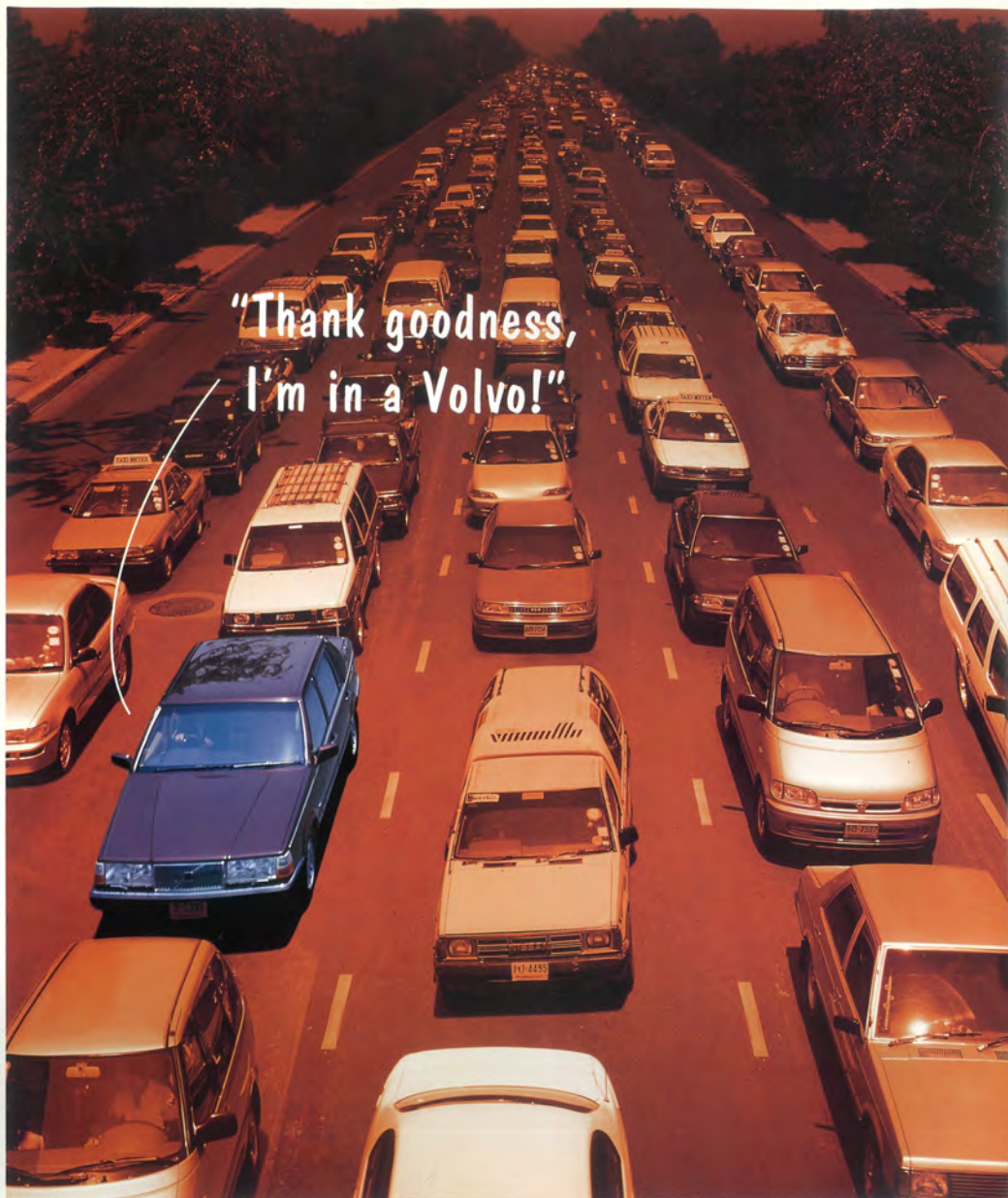
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- Press Relations in Their Infancy
- More Whinebag?
- Communications Bridges



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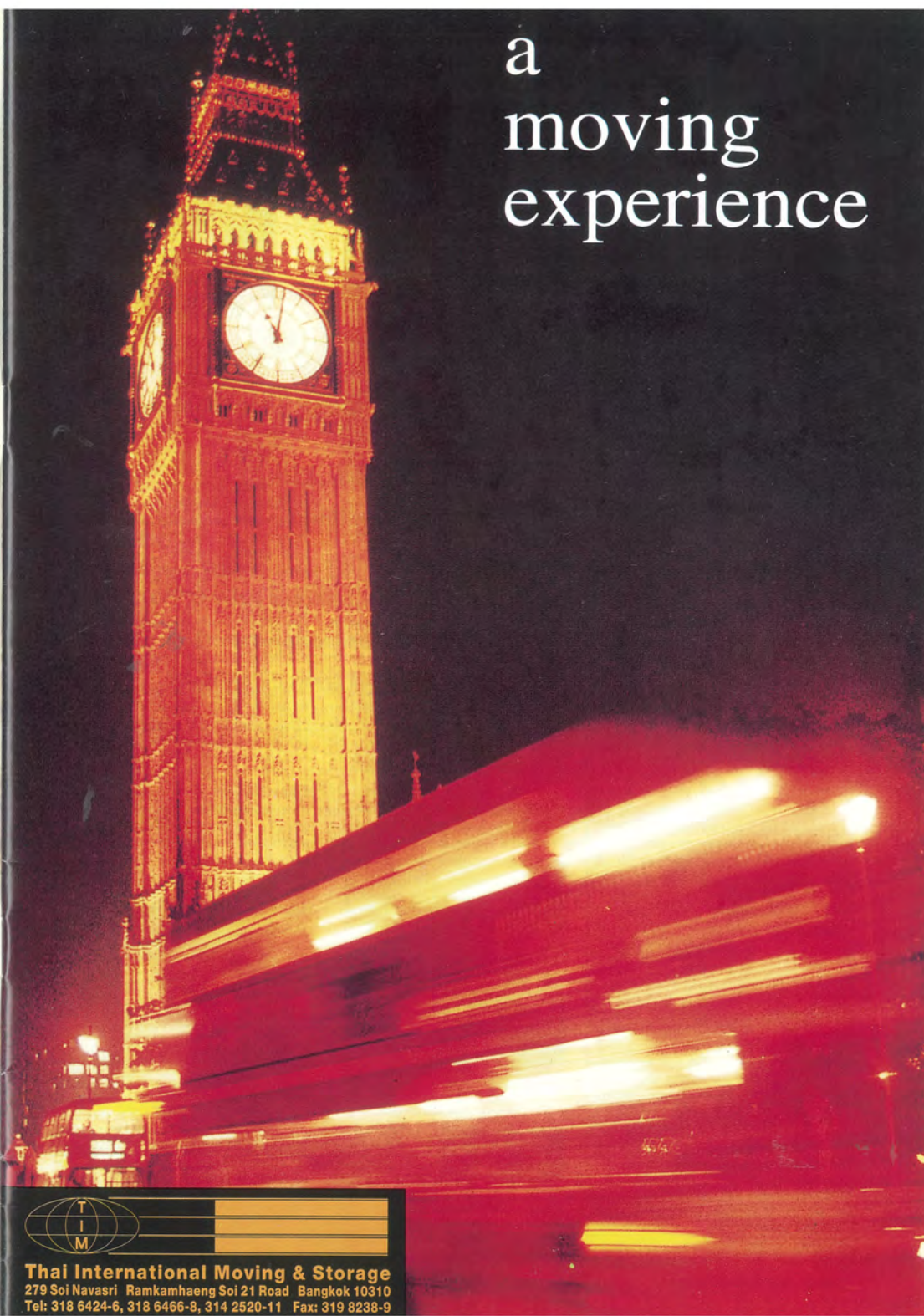
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Dateline Bangkok, the FCCT's quarterly magazine, welcomes story or photo essay contributions from our journalist and associate members. Please contact Imtiaz Muqbil on 255 1480. Payment is in FCCT club books.

FRONT COVER

Briton Glyn Barry Croft, seen here in Pattaya, who is now serving time in Dartmoor Prison, England. Picture by Andrew Drummond.

A Letter From Your President

CHITTAGONG TRACT



FCCT's own Great Leader and Dear Leader

What would you do if your editor ordered you to go to a place you have never been to before and where you know absolutely nobody? Your editor, of course, expects you to return from that place with an exclusive story and a comprehensive in-depth analysis of the local situation. Needless to say, the situation which you've been sent to cover is an extremely complex one with an intricate network of players no one outside the area has ever heard of before: unpronounceable names of local politicians, weird acronyms of a host of largely unknown clandestine organisations, and a patch-work of tribal groups whose interests overlap and are intertwined at the same time. And you also know that your readers, who are familiar with your work, would be extremely disappointed if your report was not up to the standard of the stories which you usually produce.

I was faced with this dilemma when in early 1990 my then editor in Hong Kong, Derek Davies, rang me up: "I've got this unique offer from [Bangladesh] President Ershad to send a reporter to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. I said I'd send someone who specialises in ethnic insurgency and that sort of thing." He did not want to know whether I could do it (had I said no, Derek wouldn't have believed me), or if I wanted to go (he knew how poorly paid I was). My trip was scheduled for the end of the month.

Although I had been to the port city of Chittagong on a number of occasions, I had never travelled to the forbidden Hill Tracts, which were — and still are — out of bounds to most foreigners. But that wasn't my main worry. First of all, it was obvious that it was going to be one of those terrible, stage-managed trips together with the local commander in his private helicopter. We would be surrounded by so many "bodyguards" and assorted minders that it

It was a challenge, and I didn't know what to do. After much thought, I realised there was only one way out of my dilemma. I knew that tens of thousands of tribals from the Hill Tracts had taken refuge in the northeastern state of Tripura. There were refugee camps across the border from Bangladesh. The only problem was that Tripura, which is located in a very sensitive part of India, was a restricted area too. No foreign journalist had been allowed to Tripura since the local troubles there (which are not that different from the problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts across the border in Bangladesh: hill tribes versus plains people) began in the 1970s.

But I decided to give it a try. I approached the Indian Embassy in Bangkok, and applied for permits for myself, my wife and our daughter (who then was 5 years old). The immediate reaction was one of astonishment. Weren't we that horrible couple who had sneaked into

Nagaland — another forbidden state in Northeast India — and stayed there illegally for more than two months in 1985? Not only had we managed to elude the Indian security authorities: our daughter had actually been born while we were in hiding in Nagaland. I explained that although all that was true (I had written a book about it, so it would have been ludicrous to deny it), as a professional journalist I absolutely had to see both sides of the story in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

They accepted that argument, and since the Bangladesh government had given us permission to visit the Hill Tracts, the Indians would have looked rather nasty if they had turned down our application for Tripura. We were off. But I did not inform the Bangladesh authorities of our intention to visit the refugee camps in Tripura after our trip to the Hill Tracts. If they had known more about our plans, they would most probably have cancelled their invitation to the Hill Tracts.

The trip to the Chittagong Hill Tracts went as expected. In and out of helicopters. Up and down from place to place. Interviews with a few, carefully selected people. Lavish dinner parties — but no booze (Bangladesh is a Muslim country). In any event, Hseng Nong got some good pictures and little Hseng Tai was a treasure in helping us out of awkward situations. She managed to establish a rapport with everybody she met. And I did get on well with the local commander, who very eloquently presented his views on the problem — a side of the story which I needed to present a complete picture of the situation in the Hill Tracts.

Then, we flew to Calcutta where we picked up our permits for Tripura. Fortunately, the Indian authorities had decided to leave us alone. There would be no official "escort". On the other hand, I did not know anyone in

Continued on page 6

A Letter From Your President

Tripura. It was a few days before our flight to Agartala, Tripura's state capital, so we had some time to attempt to establish our own contacts.

The first lead took us to a Buddhist temple in a small lane off Calcutta's Central Avenue. Since most Chakmas are Buddhists, we thought this would be the most likely place where to find some fugitive from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in predominantly Hindu and Muslim Calcutta. Filled with anticipation, we hurried down the narrow backlane with its open sewers and past old houses on which the plaster was cracking. We found the temple.

The first person I spotted inside the temple compound was another Caucasian. At first, I did not recognise him, but he turned in our direction and shouted my name. We were lucky. It was an old friend: Francis Rolt from the BBC's Eastern Service, and the author of a novel set in Chittagong and the Hill Tracts. Together, we climbed the ramshackle flight of stairs up to the first floor. Francis introduced us to Bimal Bhikkhu, a senior, Chakma Buddhist monk who turned out to be extremely knowledgeable. He had also a very healthy, critical view of both the Bangladesh authorities — and the Shanti Bahini guerrillas, tribal fighters from his own people who were battling the security forces.

He was not, however, willing to give us any names in Agartala. After all, he was a Buddhist monk and should stay above politics. But he very kindly recommended us to visit Benuvan Vihar, the local Buddhist monastery in Agartala.

We took a plane to Agartala a few days later. After checking in at the Broadway Guest House, which we had been told was close to Benuvan Vihar, I went to the monastery. As so often happens in Asia when a foreigner enters a strange place, there is always

someone around who wants to practise his English. A young man with Mongol features came up to me: "What's your name? Where do you come from?" I told him I was a journalist, born in Sweden but based in Bangkok. He seemed terribly pleased. "Then you must meet my Uncle. He's also a journalist. He writes for a local Chakma paper here in Agartala. I am Chakma, you see. Have you heard of us? We are Buddhist refugees from Bangladesh."

We met his uncle, who in turn introduced us to human rights workers, students, school teachers and other Chakma residents in Agartala. We soon had a huge collection of human rights reports, local magazines, propaganda brochures and cuttings from the local press. Agartala is not a big place, and word soon spread all over town that some foreign journalists were there, looking into the problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The following night — well after dark — there was a knock on our door at the Broadway Guest House. I opened it and saw a rotund, elderly gentleman in an ill-fitting suit. He was accompanied by two younger men who my instinct told me were his bodyguards. "May I come in?" the old man demanded, walking into the room. It turned out to be Upendra Lal Chakma, one of the most prominent leaders of the resistance. "I heard you were in town. Do you want to know about our struggle? About the latest actions by our Shanti Bahini fighters?"

Through the first contact we had made at Benuvan Vihar, we then rented a car — an Indian Ambassador with a driver — and went to the refugee camps. We drove all morning along bumpy roads over the hills of Tripura, down towards the Bangladesh border. We reached it at noon, and our car was immediately surrounded by thousands of curious onlookers. Many wanted to talk and

the language was not a problem: there were plenty of bored English-speaking Chakmas who thought this was quite an exciting break in the otherwise monotonous life in the camps.

A few days later, we were back in Bangkok. My magazine published in its 5 April 1990 issue an "exclusive story with an in-depth analysis" of the situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It was headlined "Intractable Hills: Autonomy Plan Fails to Appease the Rebels", and bylined "by Bertil Lintner in Takumbari Relief Camp, Tripura, and Rangamati, the Chittagong Hill Tracts." Derek was pleased — and I am still getting letters from people I met four years ago in Calcutta, Agartala, Takumbari, Dhaka and Rangamati. The Bangladeshi authorities were perhaps not as satisfied as they would have been if I had only reported their side of the story. But they reacted to my critical report in a very civilised way: I have had no problems going back to Bangladesh, a country which I like and where I feel at home.

Think of this the next time you read a story in any magazine. Journalism is a challenging and rewarding profession. But you also need a bit of luck to do an unusual story about an obscure subject.



Bertil Lintner
1994 FCCT President



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Excons & Expats

BY ANDREW DRUMMOND

Stories of journalists risking life and limb in the minefields of Cambodia and rebel held forests of Burma make interesting reading in the columns of this magazine. And I take my hat off to my colleagues in camouflage. But there are jungles much closer to home with booby traps ready to detonate at any time.

I am referring of course to the growing interest abroad in a fairly large group of foreign nationals in Thailand who for various reasons cannot go back to their own countries.

As a journalist working for the London Evening Standard and a range of newspapers and broadcasters in Britain and other English language speaking countries, I find I have to undertake a growing number of assignments tracking down and reporting on people who are wanted — or depending on how you look at it "unwanted" back home. And believe you me I have felt much happier in the camp of "heroin king" Khun Sa, than face to face with a British or other expatriate criminal in a bar in Pattaya.

Spare a moment for those journalists who occasionally have to put a foot in the door. At best this work does not generate much sympathy. Many of the characters are on the face of it extremely affable and amusing and have amassed a wide

group of friends, including local police, during their sojourn here.

There is the apocryphal story of one man who returns only to his home country to rob a bank or post office to support his lifestyle in the "Land of Smiles".

More often than not when you make your call the person you are after is happily ensconced in a bar — a beer in one hand and a girl in the other. The last person these people want on their doorstep is a journalist "taking out" a "target" or rather exposing him for the cash he might have stolen or embezzled from a pension fund back home to support his new life style. And the girl is not going to let go of her new found income lightly. These types of assignments have their hazards.

I thought my number was up last year when an escaped convict, a Briton named Glyn Croft for whom I was looking, came from behind put his hand on my shoulder and said: "You Andrew Drummond eh? I've been looking for you." Croft had been associated with a gang in England nicknamed "Torture Inc".

But fortunately it was one of the rare cases where the "target" was looking for help. Croft, a man with a self-confessed history of violence, purely wanted to surrender himself to the British authorities and go back and serve the sentence he was given before he escaped from Parkhurst Prison, on Britain's Isle of Wight.

"I'm not staying here. Thailand is much too dangerous for the likes of me," said the man, who boasted he used to roast people over electric fires.

So far I have had a relatively charmed life. In three years I have

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merely been thrown down a flight of stairs once and thumped repeatedly on the back (coincidentally to the tune of "Its the final countdown"). On both occasions the assailants were British.

I do however think I am developing a nervous tic, especially when those newsdesk calls come in. These 'nouveau rich' foreigners are generally not only going to have a dozen Thais working for them but would be quite capable of "taking out" me with their lunch money. Enquiries of this nature are on the cutting edge of journalism in the truest sense.

For a long time Pattaya and Bangkok have become havens for a mixed bag of major and minor foreign criminals and hustlers. There is indeed a pecking order of respect based on the scope of their activities. The Germans come somewhere near the top. Europeans tend to be outclassed by the Chinese however in all sectors.



A youthful Andrew Drummond interviews Khun Sa - for Britain's Granada Television.

Excons & Expats

I do not want to give the wrong impression. By far the majority of foreigners here are honest, law-abiding citizens. Despite the promotions of the Tourism Authority of Thailand the better class of British criminal are still buying homes in the Mediterranean.

In the main however the bottom end of the foreign community here is eking out a living working stolen credit cards, couriering drugs, (cannabis is fetching a staggering 1.6 million baht a kilo in Tokyo), conning tourists, or living off the proceeds of past frauds. You would be surprised at the number of people, who after visiting Thailand on holiday, decide to rip off their banks, or places of work, and head back with their gains.

THE CON-MEN

Occasionally the British Consul sends a letter to the Bangkok Post warning about the latest arriving British conman. The Embassy's role is curious. Because as soon as the man is arrested they are duty bound to protect their citizen's interest and put a blanket ban on publicity.

One chap I remember called himself a 'Director' of Paradise Films, a phoney company which gave the address of a bar in Pattaya. "Paradise Films" advertised widely in the United Kingdom for extras for a film to be made on the Eastern seaboard called: "Invasion of Thailand 2000."

Hundreds of people were promised generous remuneration and free accommodation. The catch was of course they first each had to send "Paradise Films" US\$100 for insurance fees. One would have thought people would have caught on at this stage, but the prospect of an escape from Britain's then depression enticed thousands of dollars out of people including a Wimbledon tennis coach and a public school headmistress. The man in question just had to sit in a



Briton wanted in connection with fraud on British housing charity strolls in Pattaya with his katooey girlfriend. Picture Courtesy of London Evening Standard

go-go bar in Pattaya, where he entertained local police friends, and send his girl off to bank the cheques.

Trying to get information about one Briton from another Briton in Pattaya is an interesting exercise. Nobody personally knows anything. Some bar owners who are falling over each other to get publicity in the Bangkok Post's Trink Page tend to say to reporters from their home countries, "You mention me or my bar and I'll do you."

I once arrived at a bar with two TV crews and senior tourist policeman, (ostensibly to check that everything

"YOU LIVE HERE. YOU JUST
CAN'T DISAPPEAR AFTER
THE STORY IS WRITTEN"

was in order in the bar trade but in reality more of a local police publicity stunt). The bar manager wai-ed

politely and smiled to the police as the Thai cameras rolled and I reeled off a couple of frames. But while he was unconcerned about making Channel 7 news, the knowledge that I had pictures of the same event caused him some concern. While the Thai TV crews headed off grinning into the night I was being pinned down discreetly somewhere else attempting to argue the freedom of the press with my arm being twisted behind my back. The manager said he would not like the pictures of him to be printed abroad. "I've got people back home who don't know what I'm doing." And he quite simply stole them.

But back to Paradise Films. It was a comparatively small scam. But the owner was more sinister. He was wanted in Britain for blackmailing a British schoolmaster, who had been indiscreet in the resort,

and was consistently befriending and robbing visiting tourists. He even had a Thai Tourist Police uniform which he donned on making his own raids in hotel rooms working with a string of girls to set people up with drugs — and letting them off with 30,000 baht payments or whatever he could get. The story was published in Britain, after which he moved to Kanchanaburi, started selling time-shares in large chunks of Burma before fleeing back to Britain.

THE CHANCERS

A second group of foreigners come into the category of chancers. They may have led a comparatively quite life in their own countries, keeping a 9-5 job. Then suddenly an opportunity comes to make off with a sizeable amount of money — and they grab it with both hands.

Now, I don't know how many of you foreign correspondents out there know any people wanted by police in your respective countries. But if you do, do you know any that don't claim

Excons & Expats

to have a father-in-law or brother-in-law for a Thai chief of police? Not many.

When on a recent occasion confronting a Briton with no previous record who had fled to Thailand while awaiting a charge of defrauding a charity out of UK£250,000 (a sample charge only), I was threatened with (1) immediate arrest by his father-in-law or (2) an instant pummeling. "You can't touch me now," he said, "If anyone ever tries to extradite me the local police will warn me long before anyone comes to make an arrest." The man was particularly bitter, because he had a partner, who had got the best part of a share of what could have amounted to UK£2 million. He had bought two houses in Pattaya and moved in with a katoye.

On the other hand a Scotsman charged with murder could not have been more meek when I visited him while he was out on bail though before I left he suddenly asked me to be his alibi for the night in question — so he could collect the UK£150,000 — the insurance which he had taken out on his dead business partner's life.

A common if obvious reaction I get when having to confront any Britons who have made the news for the wrong reasons in their own country is: "Watch out mate, you're in Thailand now." The implication being that while it is comparatively easy to do an exposé from the comfort and security of a major newspaper's headquarters in London, there is very little here to protect you from those sudden "dark forces". They are right of course. I couldn't argue with the partner of a man who allegedly walked off with a law office's client's deposits, and who escorted me hurriedly down a flight of stairs in an office of Pattaya South Road. But I bounced well.

I got the same warning from the owner of a gay venue in Pattaya, who had moved to Thailand before being named in a Scottish Law Commission's report

on corruption in the judiciary and police in Scotland. I had interviewed his partner but he had declined to be photographed. I did however secure a picture of him locally. The two men had, according to their own company report "misappropriated" UK£250,000 of company funds in the UK and according to other reports subsequently funded the biggest gay venue in South East Asia. (The debt was later written off by the company and no charges brought).

The warning came after a picture, which I acquired from the local Thai photographer (the only one he had was of the man in question wearing a frock and sitting on an elephant) appeared in a major Scottish newspaper under the headline something like "Gay Queen Says Innocent of Fraud." I understand why he was upset.

But the major partner, later back from many sojourns abroad instructed his own photographer to pursue me with a camera. So if the FCCT needs a new picture for next year's directory search no more.

The tourist sex trade also comes



Paradise Film's Director Michael Clarke in the uniform of the Thai tourist police.

under considerable foreign press scrutiny, in many cases unfairly because there is an amount of voyeurism attached to the stories. (Television companies for instance used to use The Temple of the Emerald Buddha to establish Thailand. Now they use Patpong).

But while what people do in their private lives is really their concern only, there are times when it comes into the public domain. That includes politicians, major personalities, even sometimes journalists, and the activities of major companies. In this respect, the stories of British snooker ace Jimmy White and his adventures in Thailand are legendary.

When the head of a leading foreign owned sports footwear manufacturer in Thailand provided 30 prostitutes for a party for the visiting Vice-Presidents of the company from every corner of the world he was, in my view; rightly accused of stepping over the line.

What started off as a consumer survey into the running shoes (Cost to make US\$7.00. Retail price US\$100 plus) fast became a scandal and ended with the company, which contributes to Amnesty International, AND supports human rights in the Third World — AND spends a lot of cash on advertising its links with Amnesty, attempting to keep its indiscretions quiet by taking a legal injunction against the newspaper in question to stop publication.

The injunction failed — not least because the newspaper was able to produce photographs of the girls at the party, even wearing the T-shirts with the company's logo (Those, that is, who were actually wearing T-shirts).

The result of all this was the normal threats but in this case they came not from the company boss, who was called back to the United States and



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given a short dressing down, but from his drinking companions, one of whom claimed a price of 25,000 baht had been offered to a local to seek physical retribution. The man himself, I believe, hadn't a clue about the threats being made on his behalf.

Another case actually involved a journalist on a British newspaper whom I found investing in a massage parlour/"brothel" in the Rajaprab area. The British newspaper in question has a reputation for running seamy stories exposing massage parlours in Britain and the reporter in question specialised in writing stories involving Thailand, not least because he had a Thai wife here. The fact that he and his extended family were running such a place, while he had a career exposing such establishments elevated the matter to that of "public interest".

The story was subsequently, published by one of Britain's more austere newspapers and the reporter lost his job. Its not however over. Dash it all. "You have no problem with me but I just can't control my Thai family while you're in Bangkok," he told me recently on one of his many forays to Thailand. "You live here. You just can't disappear after the story is written."

Controlling Glyn Barry Croft, before his departure back to a British jail last year was not so easy after he came to me for help when his partner Anthony Clements, was shot dead in Pattaya.

I first came across his name two years ago when he was arrested in Pattaya for currency offences (passing duff British notes). He and his partner had apparently broken bones in Bangkok's Nana Plaza. But they heard, through another Briton (who is currently in a Katmandu jail for drugs trafficking), that I was looking for them, long before I got to them.

Office phone: "Tony here. I hear you're looking for us. I hear you're going to write that we're in the drugs business in Pattaya. It's a load of rubbish. Look come down here and we'll tell you who are the real criminals down here."

"No I'm not writing anything at the

"...BESIDES, I HEAR YOU'VE BROKEN A FEW BONES ALREADY"

moment thanks, besides I hear you've broken a few bones already."
"What only a few?"

A meeting was arranged but Clements did not survive to make it. He was literally blown apart when a shotgun was fired through the window of his truck on the Jomtien Road. I attended his funeral, where I met a bunch of people who, I think I can safely say, would not have looked out of place in San Quentin, and a Thai national with a pistol in his back pocket, who took my snapshot, — presumably not for his family album. (FCCT please note).

When I finally met Croft it was quite clear that both he and Clements were wanted dead by at least five different groups in Thailand. The most likely candidates were a Scandinavian-Thai heroin trafficking group, who they had conned out of US\$50,000.

After arrangements were made through other parties with the Thai Police, Croft now writes to me from the comparative safety of Dartmoor



Glyn Croft is now safely home in Dartmoor Prison, England.

Prison, England, where he is serving time, for the offence from which he escaped to come to Thailand in the first place.

But the five days keeping him out of trouble in Bangkok, where he went to every single night-time venue where he could possibly be recognised, was harrowing.

At times I am asked by fellow journalists, whom I occasionally meet at the FCCT, embassy cocktail parties, or local bars: "Don't these stories get you down?" The answer is yes. Occasionally. It's sometimes easy to forget the very positive points about life in Thailand. Life is also marked by moments of mad, if unnecessary excitement like a recent Hollywood-style car chase round the eastern seaboard.

Thankfully, it only takes up a fraction of my time. But while I periodically make forays into Cambodia and Burma, it is a fact of life that many newspapers, with few exceptions, tend in the main to be more interested in what their own nationals get up to abroad than in a journalist's projections on the future of Myanmar's SLORC.

The death threats I do not take too seriously. I have been here long enough to know I won't get advance warning.

Journalists' Profile

Andrew Drummond is a Foreign Correspondent for the London Evening Standard and Associated Newspapers in London. He formerly worked for among others the Observer Film Company and Fox TV Stations NY. He has also reported for and produced a number of television documentaries in the region, including "Burma's Forgotten War" (BBC2), "Lord of the Golden Triangle" (ITV Granada), and "No Man Wants to die" (Channel 4 UK). "No Man Wants to Die" is not about his own fears in Thailand, but Briton Derrick Gregory who was hanged in Malaysia for drugs trafficking. During the filming he was attacked by a narcotics syndicate chief in West London.

Drummond is particularly proud of an award received in London for investigations into fascism and anti-racism. He went undercover joining the British Nazi group the League of St George for over a year. A reader later wrote to him expressing the wish that he be castrated by Rastafarians.

Club Highlights

THE INAUGURAL BALL – INDOCHINA NIGHT



Bertil, Hseng Tai and Hseng Nong Lintner caught plotting to establish the FCCT's first ruling dynasty. Stay tuned for the show trial.



Award-winning Hollywood screenwriter Sterling Silliphant promising to read Christopher Moore's latest blockbuster the minute dinner finished.



Sonya Hepinstall of Reuter obligingly looks the other way as hubby Steve Rasin swings into party mode.



Rodney Tasker and Sonya Hepinstall assured Somlak Sisamphan from the Government Spokesman's Office that rumours of Indochinese infiltration at Government House have been wildly exaggerated by the foreign media.



Being the closest thing the FCCT has to Hercule Poirot, Eric Brighton was called in to investigate the strange case of 100 emaciated chickens napalmed 25 years ago somewhere along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In honor of the night's Indochine theme, they were served up as the ball's main course.



Proving that ladies are sometimes attracted to stuffed shirts, Dr Owen Wrigley squeezes Laura Allen as Belinda Stewart-Cox pretends not to notice anything amiss.

Club Highlights

INDOCHINA BALL



One of those touching moments: Ed Grant, struggling to get his prize off the lovely Tiana, finds his nose caught in her left ear.



IMMF chief instructor Jacques Leslie was rumoured to be packing a Magnum in his jacket pocket just in case IMMf Co-President Dominic Faulder got sticky about signing off on the group's drinks bill.



Tata from Baan Lao, left, with the FCCT Executive Committee's very own bubbly caviar lady, Pamela Hongsakul



IMMF lynchpin Sarah McLean, right, looked after Dr. Darunee Hiranprak, left, and other senior representatives of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Communication Arts.



Knight Ridder's Mark Timm enthalls the IMMf's Jacques Leslie with an account of his recent audition for the part of the Tin Man in a forthcoming amateur dinner theatre production of the Wizard of Oz. Effervescent Whitney Small (not shown here for technical reasons) is a hot tip for the Judy Garland part.



Perhaps inspired by the napalmed rubber chicken served for dinner, IMMf Co-President Denis Gray entertained friends with other culinary horror tales from his Vietnam days.

Press Relations in Their Infancy

BY VICTOR MALLET

IT IS surprisingly easy to discover exciting but unprintable truths about skulduggery in the Thai business world (unprintable, alas, because of the laws of libel). But it is surprisingly difficult to find out the stuff that financial journalists can and do print every day — routine company results, for example. Few experiences are more irritating for a financial journalist in Thailand than spending hours attempting to get a company to confirm a piece of information that is already theoretically in the public domain.

Only the other day, I contacted a senior executive at a very large Thai bank to ask for an explanation of the bank's impressive profit figures for 1993, only to be assured that the figures would not be released until the next week.

I almost howled with frustration; after all, I knew the bank had issued the figures, because I had looked over the shoulder of a friend in a neighbouring office and seen them on the Stock Exchange of Thailand's computer service.

Of course, there was no question of the bank having sent me the figures by fax or messenger, a routine operation for large companies in other countries.

Despite repeated pleas to chief executives and public relations managers, not one Thai company — not one, I promise — has ever voluntarily sent me its financial results or an important company announcement (except between one day and one week late), although up to half the company might be owned by foreign investors. I am not the only financial journalist who howls in Bangkok; when we meet we have mutual howling sessions.

Lest I be accused of unfairness to large Thai banks, I should add that the bank in question is no worse than any other company in Thailand. Even foreign companies and international organisations — I would single out



Artist's impression of prototype central European hospitality suite for business journalists

the Thai-Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the World Bank as praiseworthy exceptions — seem to be very bad at press relations in Bangkok. The science of media relations here is in its infancy, especially in financial matters, and has not developed at anything like the same rate as the Thai economy.

I am now the proud possessor of several calculator-cum-pen desk sets, a couple of silk ties (one from a large agro-industrial conglomerate), a couple of watches, and a photograph frame (from a telecommunications company), not to mention a silver amulet of an elephant god (from a brewery). Encouraged by squads of charming and smartly-dressed PR ladies, I have put my business card on a silver platter at company meetings and press conferences more times than I can remember, and enthusiastically written down my telephone and fax numbers in a giant ledger.

But nothing has happened. No press releases have arrived, and I often

hear about the press conferences only because of a stray rumour.

Let me give an example of the sort of problems that companies create for themselves. Thai Airways International has a large and active public relations department; they even send me faxes and are more helpful than most. In mid-February their latest quarterly net profit and earnings per share figures were announced by the SET, which released them via its computer screens. The share price went up nearly 10 per cent.

I rang Thai to ask about the figures and obtain more details, but was told: "It's from the stock exchange. We haven't got the press release. We cannot release any information right now."

Some executives in Thai, and in other companies, believe that they are forbidden to disclose financial information except to the SET. This is untrue. What they must do — and this is similar to the rules in other countries — is disclose any market-moving information to the stock

Press Relations in Their Infancy

exchange FIRST. Then they are allowed to tell the media and anyone else; indeed, in some countries, companies are actually obliged to inform the media and the public. The story has a further twist. While most stockbrokers and journalists (and therefore most investors) were in the dark about anything other than Thai's net profit figure, at least one Thai executive was giving out detailed explanations of the airline's financial performance to reporters from *The Nation*.

That makes them good reporters with good contacts. But it also undermines Thai's justification — the sensitivities of the SET — for keeping the facts from other people.

If I were asked for recommendations, I would first ask the SET to stop the nonsense whereby routine

company information reaches the public in dribs and drabs over one or more days — first the net profit, then a summary of the profits and balance sheet, and then the full results. (The SET, incidentally, is planning the improve the speed at which information is made available to the media). There is no level playing field when one stock market player might know only that a company has doubled its profits, while another might be aware that the company actually made an operating loss and achieved the profit by selling half its assets.

Then I would beg companies to save themselves, and us financial journalists, a lot of wasted time by issuing press releases with the figures and perhaps a brief commentary from the chief executive, together with the name of someone to contact at the

company.

With the help of a growing number of international and local public relations companies in Bangkok, Thai companies are slowly getting better at informing the media. I will offer a bottle of champagne to the first Thai company which voluntarily, without prompting, faxes me its financial results on the same day they are announced to the stock exchange; but I reckon I will be howling for a little while yet.

Journalists' Profile

Victor Mallet is a regional correspondent for London's *Financial Times*. He has been howling (to no avail) in Bangkok for over two years.

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English Language Newspapers

BY ANDRE McNICOLL

SHOULD THERE BE ANOTHER WHINEBAG?

Is there more to English-language newspapers in Thailand than Whinebag and The World According to Bernard Trink? Is there an obscure mutual fund on the Shanghai bourse we should all invest in that *The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post* will not tell us about?

Singapore Press Holdings and a motley collection of Thai firms (including, strangely, Mechai Viravaidhya's Population and Community Development Association) would like a lot of us to believe that we are starving for more business news about the region. Well, even after our panel discussion on August 3, we still don't know if *Business Day*, which is expected to appear on Bangkok news-stands in January next year will make a go of it.

At the panel talk, Ms Sanralee Boonket, media director at Dentsu, Young & Rubicam, and Mr Peter Emblin, managing director at Baring Research, presented a richly detailed analysis of the newspaper market in Thailand.

Though they preferred avoiding hard conclusions, they both suggested that a well edited and researched, business-oriented daily would face a rough ride for the first two years but, if successful, could seriously threaten either *The Nation* or *Bangkok Post*.

Ms Sanralee said total ad expenditures in Thailand in 1993 were a little over 27 billion baht of which about 1.8 billion baht went to *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post*, meaning that each paper gets almost 900 million baht of advertising revenue a year.

"Newspaper advertising revenue is going up each year, and a new high-quality newspaper should get its fair share," she said.

Another key question is whether or not there are enough English-literate people in Thailand to sustain a fourth newspaper. About 12% of the Thai

population is English-literate but only 0.5% of Thais read an English-language newspaper. With the rate of English-literacy going up, there is a potential market out there, but it should be remembered that it is a minuscule niche market and that the number of people reading English-language newspapers has flattened out at 250,000.

According to Emblin, between 1987 and 1992, newspaper circulation in Thailand rose by 13%, considerably faster than the population increases of 9.4%. During that same period,



total revenues for the two English-language newspapers rose by a whopping 190% with media expenditures rising by 220% (newspapers account for 27% of ad expenditures).

The highest newspaper penetration rate is among the affluent (30,000 baht or more per month) but the fastest growing segment is in the middle-income group (15,000 to 29,999 baht per month).

Emblin said that the business outlook for both *The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post* is positive. Baring

Research expects profit growth to average 25% in 1994 and 1995. And the launch of *Business Day*, at least initially, may help both *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post* because both papers won't bother with high-cost promotion, leaving it to the challenger to find its market and pay the price.

Says Emblin, "Another challenge for *Business Day* is lack of skilled staff, because that means heavy labour costs." However, he sees no reason why advertising expenditures should not continue to grow at about 10% a year, faster than the expected GDP growth of about 7%.

So far, not a word about *Thailand Times*, whose existence is one of the best kept secrets in the newspaper publishing business. An educated guess is that after eight months, it has a circulation of about 10,000, almost exclusively in hotels and airlines. Rumours have it that the well-financed (but horrendously printed) paper will launch a vigorous promotion campaign in October of this year.

Business Day's backers aim at providing comprehensive regional business news, convinced that the business community is starving for such. However, with the Asian Wall Street Journal selling only 2,000 copies a day in Thailand, it's not clear if Thais really care about regional business news. On the other hand, it could mean that there's a fabulous market out there just waiting to be exploited.

Stay tuned, like for about two years.

Journalists' Profile

Andre McNicoll is a freelance Canadian editor and journalist.

BY LANCE WOODRUFF with SARAH COLM

AYUTHAYA, Thailand — The midday heat weighs heavily on the small group of men and women as they hear stories of the kings and queens of the former Thai capital, and reflections on Southeast Asia then and now. The speaker is British, Sarah McLean, project director of the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF). The questioners are Asian, nationals of Vietnam, Cambodia and the Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic, mature men and women who have lived a lot of history already, who (though their specialized training is modest) are working journalists from the leading newspapers and other media in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, Vientiane and Phnom Penh. Because they are journalists, some are thinking about story ideas inspired by this visit to write at home in a month's time.

Talk about building bridges in friendship comes pretty cheap, and journalists anywhere tend to be a skeptical lot. But there is a tangible reality to what this lot is about. They are bridges.

And McLean has a feeling for the region in which she is immersed. As "right-hand man" for "Killing Fields" producer-director David Putnam, McLean is no new hand here. She is concerned for each of the women and men designated for IMMF training. It would be easy, and incorrect, to characterize this training as showing Indochina's media how to "do it right" by western standards. IMMF is dedicated to helping the media at all levels in the Indochina countries to see, understand and report more effectively as they interpret national and world concerns to their readers, viewers and listeners.

Chinese journalists are getting a feeling about Thailand's history and how "Indochina" looks from Bangkok — Indochina in terms of contemporary business, culture and

**BANGKOK'S
INTERNATIONAL MEDIA
COMMUNITY PITCHED IN
WITH ENTHUSIASM,
ADDING PRACTICAL VISION
AND DEPTH TO THE
TRAINING WITH SPECIAL
LECTURES**

politics, and Indochina across the span of centuries — and despite centuries of fear, distrust and misinformation. This feeling is not easily evoked in a classroom in Hue — where Page and the IMMF would like to endow a media archive, for instance — or other cities.

This field trip was not intended as a core part of the three-week training organized over two years by the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation and conducted in May —



Right now the Indo- The IMMF secured 15 participants from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos for its first course.

but it symbolizes the significance and potential for change and practical understanding that can develop from IMMF activities.

Funding from The Asia Foundation and the Freedom Forum made it possible to conduct IMMF's first training with professional journalists, veteran correspondent Jacques Leslie who was posted to Saigon and Phnom Penh as Los Angeles Times correspondent during what the Vietnamese call "the American War," and Sara Colm, former managing editor of the Phnom Penh Post.

The May training culminated in a party — the FCCT Annual Ball May 28 at which certificates were awarded by FCCT President Bertil Lintner. Leslie and Colm expressed pleasure, surprise, and a bit of chagrin, to be American journalists charged with the task of building bridges in Indochina, opening doors and windows of the mind — to let media breezes into Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia so that they may more fully understand Thailand and the wider world. IMMF does not limit funding, or training expertise, to Americans, and is actively seeking wider funding.

Bangkok's international media community pitched in with enthusiasm, adding practical vision and depth to the training with special lectures: Bertil Lintner and Paul Handley of the Far Eastern Economic Review, Robert Karniol of Jane's Defence Weekly, Ron Moreau of Newsweek, Michele Cooper of Agence France Presse, Dominic Faulder of Bureau Bangkok, Tom Mintier of Cable Network News, Denis Gray of Associated Press, Al Scott of AP Dow Jones International News Service, Dan Robinson of the Voice of America, and Mark Timm of Knight-Ridder Financial News all shared their experience and



IMMF demonstrated western media values of independence, freedom and truth concern.

Local participation, media and otherwise, included a superb presentation by Suchada Tangtongtavy who sensitized the participants to cross-cultural interactions, Bengt Juhlin and his Mekong Secretariat colleagues on the Mekong River Basin, Post environmental writer Sanitsuda Ekachai, environmental reporter Malee Traisawasdichai of The Nation, Bangkok Post Outlook editor David Pratt on differences between feature and news perspectives, Belinda Stewart-Cox of the Seub Nakasthien Foundation who was most effective in explaining why the environment is an important issue, and Claus Dehio of Presko.

What difference does a month make? "By Western standards, journalism is at a primitive stage in Indochina. Wars have taken their toll, as has poverty and isolation," AP reported.

IMMF demonstrated western media values of "independence, freedom and truth," AP reported. "A correspondent for Jane's Defence Weekly [Canadian Robert Karniol] gave them a talk on how he snoops around digging up the number of battleships and other military secrets of governments. A Thai reporter covering the environment (Sanitsuda Ekachai of the Bangkok Post) talked about doing investigations to expose

government wrongdoing."

"Vietnam's Vu Son Thuy, a journalist for 3 1/2 years, came to Bangkok for some Western training and had his whole way of new writing turned upside down — literally." That's how Peter Eng of the Associated Press opened his dispatch about the IMMF's first training program. Distributed worldwide, AP explained that Vietnamese journalistic style "eases the reader in" with an introduction, slowly expanding the middle and coming to the end — and the most important points. A pyramid, if sketched, while IMMF training brought Thuy face-to-face with the "inverted pyramid." Western custom has major new developments first as a "lead," followed by less important details. The story tapers off with background so readers can immediately see what the news is.

"If you wrote in an inverted pyramid, people in Vietnam would say the lead is an elephant and the conclusion is a mouse. It doesn't have logic," AP quotes Thuy as saying. "Our way of thinking is not to surprise you in the beginning."

But Thuy said he saw merit in the inverted pyramid and would try it out in Hanoi, where he is a senior editor at the Foreign Ministry's World Affairs Weekly. Like the other 14 IMMF fellows from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos who completed

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the IMMF's first training course, Thuy never studied journalism.

"I learned to distinguish a feature from hard news and improved my writing," said Moeun Chhean Nariddh, 21, staff reporter for the Phnom Penh Post. "Before, I felt like a frog in a small pond. Now everything has been opened up for me. I have lots of story ideas now."



David Pratt of the Bangkok Post

During their internships the journalists — mostly from the state-run press — had an opportunity to interview a Thai Member of Parliament embarking on a hunger strike in a pro-democracy bid as well as observe a lively session of parliament in which MPs openly debated charges of drug trafficking among their colleagues.

"In Vietnam it's unheard of for reporters to have such easy access to government meetings," commented one IMMF trainee.

"Western standards of journalism may not be applicable to our countries," said another. "Whether applicable or not, we should still be exposed to it. Western journalists can learn about our opinions as well." Welcomed by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand and Bangkok's media, business and professional communities in a May 10 IMMF-sponsored reception at the FCCT Clubhouse, the 15 spent nearly an entire month in Thailand in May — in the classroom, hearing specialized lectures, visiting Parliament, Thai Rath newspaper, the Mekong Secretariat and the Bank of Thailand. Some even had their writing assignments published in the Bangkok media.

Seven IMMF fellows came from Vietnam: Nguyen Huy Thang, Thieu Nien Phong, Hanoi; Nguyen thi Kim Ho Diep, Thien Phong, Hanoi; Vu Son Thuy, World Affairs Weekly, Hanoi; Nguyen Dinh Xe, Quang Nam Danang, Danang; Nguyen Van Thang, Saigon Times, Ho Chi Minh City; Truong Cong Hoi, Bao Ngui Lao Dong, Ho Chi Minh City.

Three came from the Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic: Adisak Saignasith and Phetsakhone Luangviseth, Khao San Pathet Lao and Pouttha Khamphavong of Passason, all in Vientiane.

Five came from Cambodia: Phin Chanda, Ministry of Information Press Department and NHK Bureau; Moeun Chhean Nariddh, Phnom Penh Post; Seng Moch, Asahi

Shimbun; Seng Kimseang, Reuters; Ros Sokhet, Cambodia Daily; and Reach Sambath, Agence France Presse.

The IMMF, and the training, is the first fruit of an idea developed by British photojournalist Tim Page. On 12 December 1990 Page (once a forester) planted a symbolic bo

tree to memorialize the sacrifice of some 320 journalists from 40 countries who became casualties of Indochina's wars in the last half century.

Planted at the 17th Parallel on Vietnam's Ben Hai River, a symbolic act witnessed by the Dean of the Arts Faculty at the nearby University of Hue, a handful of local villagers, government representatives and a British TV crew, the gift of life in the bo tree has sprouted into a gift-inheritance from international journalists to the peoples of Indochina. The IMMF is a living inheritance now taking partial form in a first training course.

Funded by grants from the US-based Asia Foundation and Freedom Forum, as well as by funds realized from auctioning signed prints given by Indochina war correspondents worldwide for the IMMF November 1992 exhibition, "War, Peace and the Printed Image: Four Decades of Indochina Photography," the IMMF May training course is the "first fruit" of Page's planting.

It also results from hard work and the goodwill of countless people — Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer government



IMMF Participants

officials to lawyers, the business community and educators such as Dr. Darunee Hirunrak, Dean of the Faculty of Communication Arts, and her colleagues at Chulalongkorn University, where the training was held.

IMMF trainees briefly interned with Thai and international staff at the Associated Press (Vu Son Thuy); The Nation English-language daily (Nguyen thi Kim Ho Diep, business; Phin Chanda, television; Moeun Chhean Nariddh, Focus; Seng Moch, political; Ros Sokhet, features/political; and Truong Cong Hoi, world affairs); Bangkok Post (Seng Kimseang, foreign desk; Reach Sambath, environmental/political; Nguyen Dinh Xe, sports/features; Adisak Saignasith, environment/tourism); Bangkok Post Student Weekly (Nguyen Huy Thang); Thansethakit Thai daily (Phetsakhone Luangviseth, Pouttha Khamphavong),



The course was taught at Chulalongkorn

and with Knight-Ridder Financial News (Nguyen Van Thang). Personal connections were made between Thai and Indochinese media that would otherwise never have come about.

Reflecting something of what they learned in almost one month in Bangkok, some IMMF fellows published articles in the Bangkok press: Nguyen Huy Thang, "Master of the Wushu sword," The Nation; Nguyen Dinh Xe, "Ancient holy land gets a new lease on life," Inside Indochina, Bangkok Post; Ros Sokhet, "Sovan ready to make a comeback in Cambodian politics," Inside Indochina, Bangkok Post; Truong Cong Hoi, "Vietnamese peace prayer ceremony honour delights 82-year-old," Inside Indochina, Bangkok Post; Nguyen Van Thang, "Worsening environment a big worry," Inside Indochina, Bangkok Post.

The IMMF expects to recognize even more by-lines in the future.

Journalists' Profile

Lance Woodruff is a Bangkok-based freelance photojournalist whose regional coverage dates from the "American War".



IMMF Chief Trainer Jacques Leslie



IMMF Assistant Trainer Sarah Colm

Dr Darunee Hirunrak, right, of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Communication Arts was on hand to welcome IMMF participants.



Freedom Forum's regional representative, John Schidlovsky, with the IMMF's Sarah McLean.



Phetsakhone Luangviseth gets her IMMF certificate from FCCT President Bertil Lintner.



IMMF participants took a Sunday off to go and visit Ayuthaya.



Whirled Cup Football

BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS GIDEON RACHMAN AND PHILIP SHERWELL CAN TAKE CREDIT FOR ORGANISING AN AD HOC FCCT FOOTBALL TEAM THAT SHOWS DANGEROUS SIGNS OF BECOMING AN INSTITUTION.

ts debut match against the British Embassy on possibly the hottest day of the year resulted in a 4-1 win by a whisker for the diplomats. This was against an unfit and poorly co-ordinated tribe of hacks who reckoned they were short of at least twelve substitutes. There were nevertheless star turns from FCCT hardies Philip Blenkinsop, Paul Clements-Hunt, Bob Karniol and Andrew Chant (who has promised to actually join one day). Sartorially sensitive as always, Presidentissimo Bertil Lintner refused to play on the grounds that he would look "pathetic" in football strip.



Andrew Drummond ("Bloodbath" to his friends) takes some well deserved time out from chasing British criminals around Bangkok and Pattaya.



Look, no ghurkas. A victorious British Embassy team trounced this enthusiastic but unfit assortment of FCCT personalities.



Sweltering heat on the Bangkok Patana school pitch made life-saving pauses for refreshment essential.

Giacinta (swinging) and Rojanna Chant were more than pleased with Andrew Chant's performance in the FCCT goal.



Keen to recover some face, the FCCT subsequently challenged a long-suffering advertising company, Ogilvy & Mather, to a game on a pitch beneath the expressway. The hard fought match saw the FCCT heavy brigade run off with a massive 2-1 win. The crowd (three wives, three children and two dogs) was ecstatic. The only damage, to the head of *The Nation's* James Fahn in a collision, was later deemed to have improved his writing.

Whirled Cup Football



Despite being American, Ken Stier seemed quite well versed in the ways of soccer. He proved a dangerous attacker who benefited from being possibly the only person who was actually fit.



Philip Sherwell and Anthony Wilson were two of the larger bruisers fielded by the FCCT to intimidate our friends in the advertising industry.



Captain Gideon Rachman coolly ignores an unsubtle attempt to substitute him in the second half.



Rachman hits the bottle under cover of half-time.



The editor of the Far Eastern Economic Review thinks Michael Vatikiotis has been applying for a Hanoi visa. Disguised as a crippled mafioso, he has in fact been more successful breaking legs for the FCCT's first eleven.



The victorious FCCT team flushed with the euphoria of total vanquishment and annihilation of Ogilvy & Mather.



Writer's block? Walking wounded James Fahn cleared his with a bump on the head



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Wandering Eye

Doug Logan of Lippo recently departed Thailand for the verdant pastures bordering Roxas Boulevard. The defection deprived the FCCT of its first, and probably last, three-term Treasurer. So prized was Doug in this position that last year's Executive Committee amended the club constitution to enable him to remain. Indeed only the President is still confined to two one-year terms — as if any sane individual would wish for three. News of Doug's departure was greeted with uniform dismay. A shortlist of candidate Treasurers was swiftly drafted on the back of a five-baht chit and then mislaid. Fortunately, as the spectre of renewed fiscal disarray loomed, something of a miracle occurred. Standard Chartered's Domenica Piantedosi was entertained one Monday lunchtime and persuaded that here might be the perfect antidote to her normal 80-hour weeks in the real world of high finance. A couple of Tuesday Executive Committee meetings were all it took to convince her that she had made a brilliant decision. For anyone used to being focussed and decisive, the FCCT's politburo — a last proud bastion of woolly thinking, procrastination and intrigue — provides 24-carat therapy. Burnt-out corporate types who can't afford a month off in a German health spa might do a lot worse than consider a spell as Associate Director of this or that at the FCCT.

♦♦♦

It's axiomatic that correspondents are meant to cover stories, not figure in them. But life is not always that simple. For example, fearless dispatches by Knight Ridder's Mark Timm from the top floor of The Dusit Thani have won him an enthralled global following — and not just in hirsute epicurean circles. Rumours that the working title for the first instalment in Timm's forthcoming memoirs is 'Curry Fluff' could not be confirmed as Dateline went to print. In Cambodia, meanwhile, the Daily Telegraph's Leo Dobbs found himself pinned down under fire during a



government push against the Khmer Rouge. To his horror, he suddenly realised that he had been shot — right smack in the can of pâté he was carrying to compensate for the shortage of remotely decent eateries in northwestern Cambodia. This tale of sacrifice in the line of duty made it to the front page of his paper. Also in Cambodia, Nate Thayer of the Far Eastern Economic Review has been attracting considerable interest. Having failed to kill off Tim Page, one the world's greatest living photojournalists, during an al fresco elephant ramble across most of northeastern Cambodia (ostensibly in search of the fabled lost kouprey), Thayer's matchless reporting succeeded in infuriating one of the country's co-premiers to such an extent that rumours of an imminent expulsion were everywhere. In what might go down as one of the more remarkable feats of modern reverse diplomacy, Thayer signed up for a swimming race across the Tonle Sap. Having the temerity to win the event was bad enough; outstroking the proud national swimming team by hundreds of yards was worse; totally unforgivable was stepping up to receive his glittering prize — in the full glare of a tittering massed press corps — from the very same co-premier whose most fervent wish was that Thayer quietly return to the US of A. The presentation to Thayer can fairly be described as perfunctory. Concerned friends strongly recommended a spell away from the limelight. But, as they say, some have

greatness thrust upon them. Shortly afterwards, Thayer was roused from his slumbers early one morning by a royal personage apparently embroiled in a disastrously ill-conceived attempt to topple the government. Perhaps a measure of just how very badly things had gone wrong was that the said dignitary felt compelled to solicit Thayer's assistance in saving his hide. Twenty minutes and at least six hysterical cellular phone calls later, Thayer was busy extracting the rumpled royal personage from the ceiling cavity of a hotel room, and from there helping him on his way into humiliating exile overseas. A model of indiscretion, Thayer's exploits found their way into just about every newsweekly in the world. Mere days later, Thayer was in the FCCT clubhouse regaling a packed audience with his experiences, insights and dire warnings about the dangers of historical revisionism. Thayer's glistening bald pate — a fine tribute to the Blenkinsop school of nihilistic depilation — inspired awed references to "The Great Bald One" in some of the darker recesses of the clubhouse. As the conversation turned to coiffures, a suggestion was floated that maybe Timm should consider "Hair Apparent and Other Tales from the FCCT" for the title of his forthcoming magnum opus ...

♦♦♦

There is no truth in the rumour being circulated exclusively in Dateline that Phnom Penh Post publisher Michael



Wandering Eye

Hayes is contemplating suing the FCCT for listing him in the latest Directory as "Editor-in-Chief" of his sublime organ. It is a little known fact that Hayes is actually quite good at spelling. Correct spelling has anyway never been a conspicuous virtue of

it, but somehow didn't feel constrained to actually make a presentation. In the end, Cruaasia's Neville Pick won through purely on merit. "We've decided to go with the devil we know," Presidentissimo Bertil Lintner confided to him after the big decision.



Presidentissimo Bertil Lintner has been deeply engrossed in renegotiating the lease agreement for another three-year period. At one of the more difficult junctures in the proceedings he was heard to exclaim, "I will not be the person who signs the FCCT's death warrant." Commentators generally characterize this kind of statement as a tough negotiating stance. It was just this kind of hard-nosed attitude that forced The Dusit Thani to back down from an attempt to introduce a dress code clause into the new contract. In no uncertain terms, it was made clear to the management that such a clause was quite unnecessary since our members generally do wear clothes when visiting the club. The Executive Committee hopes that members will continue to arrive fully clothed, though a slightly more relaxed demeanour may on occasions be possible in the remoter confines of the clubhouse. Members should certainly not hesitate to inform the management if they spot any naked guests streaking around the hotel.



The recent ASEAN Foreign Ministers



Meeting at the Shangri-la was for the main part predictably tedious with a few moments of light relief. Despite all the security, an extremely senior regional dignitary was collared by a lost guest who evidently mistook him for a member of staff. Two



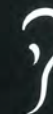
photographers made way for a wet guest in a bathrobe paddling back from the pool to the lifts only to realize too late that they had missed an excellent shot of the Russian Foreign Minister in an unguarded moment. A gaggle of elderly Australian tourists fell out of a lift into a barrage of flash bulbs and TV lights just as senior delegates were arriving for a "working dinner". "Where's the terrace buffet?" squawked one totally disorientated old lady. A rather smartly dressed, bearded individual in a suit with a file under one arm gestured imperiously to some doors nearby. The lady grabbed her husband and fled, hissing: "Was that Gareth Evans?" Indeed it was. Australia's distinguished foreign minister and aspiring Nobel had his revenge on the press later when introduced to a popular foreign correspondent for the first time. "You invent stories!" he boomed. Who said the age of great diplomacy was dead?



FCCT directories. A new category, "Journalist", was introduced on an experimental basis a few years back, but it didn't catch on. Other blunders perpetrated by a long string of pretty inept publishers include reshuffling photographs with no respect whatever for age, sex or nationality. One of the most exciting errors was, perhaps unfortunately, intercepted before it got to print. The club's extremely quirky hybrid database managed to rearrange spouses so that all married members suddenly got hitched with a new partner. This would at least have had the advantage of dispelling any reputation for stuffiness the club may have acquired — and in a few cases possibly have rendered a real service to members. In a final effort to solve these dreadful perennial publishing nightmares, the Executive Committee has appointed a new publisher, Cruaasia, to take over both the annual Directory and Dateline, this alleged quarterly. Nobody is quite sure what Cruaasia actually means, but 'Bust Kitchen' seems a pretty fair approximation. There was of course keen interest in securing the FCCT's prestigious business. One of the biggest magazine publishers in town said they might do



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