

Dateline BANGKOK

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine Second Quarter 1997

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met the Foreign Press





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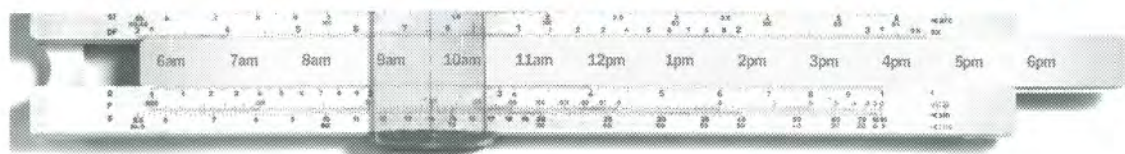
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AWSJ

FROM THE PRESIDENT

PHILIPPE DECAUX

Bonjour



Photo: LANCE WOODRUFF

"We can expect a new influx of correspondents, journalists and associate members, disassociating themselves from the uncertain future of Hong Kong or from the stiffness of Singapore."

The F.C.C.T. begins the Year of the Ox with a new board whose president, elected North Korean style (without opposition) at the last AGM, is a dragon in Chinese astrology and a Leo for the Westerners. Yet, I have not consulted any specialist on the future compatibility between those three elements, nor did we have the time, at the first board meeting, to question each others astrological background.

But I can tell you that this first meeting went on for four hours, drafting fresh policies, getting our first Dateline and the long awaited Directory on a fast track to publishing, and preparing a series of programmes, special events, Annual Ball and Embassy Nights which will keep the Club and its members excited, enthralled and busy for the rest of the year. From my point of view, the stars were on the zenith of the F.C.C.T. on that very same day.

And I was particularly pleased with the sense of energy and dedication which emanated from all board members who were elected on the 31st of January, many of them for their first time on the job, others old timers sternly dedicated to keep the F.C.C.T. alive.

Alive at a period where we can expect a new influx of correspondents, journalists and associate members, disassociating themselves from the uncertain future of Hong Kong or from the stiffness of Singapore. Let it be known to all of them, that the F.C.C.T. will be for them like a new home and our members like family, thus following the tradi-

tional concept of Thai hospitality to which we all adhere.

The F.C.C.T. will also spread its wings through the internet, first with its e-mail service which is now fully adult. And I can guarantee You, that all complaints, requests and advise will be studied by all board members and replies will be prompt. We have also been offered a Website where we will publicize all events to come, bring in reports and visuals from previous ones and, in general, keep You informed of new members arrivals, press briefings

"We have been offered a Website where we will publicize all events to come, bring in reports and visuals from previous ones and - in general - keep You informed .."

outside of our premises, special menus of our restaurant, and all that is part of the life of the Club.

Finally, for those who wish another location for the F.C.C.T., we will launch a feasibility study of various sites with the help of our Club House Committee and suggestions or ideas from all members will be taken into consideration. But one must understand that the previous move was a costly one, which has seriously depleted our backbone funds and we will probably need to launch a fund raising campaign to be able to implement any new move.

All in all, we have a busy year ahead but we are all ready for it... with your presence and support.

MEMBERS & MEDIA

FREE E-MAIL ON REPORTERS NETWORK

The Reporters Network has launched a new service offering free E-Mail for Journalists who are members of the net - <http://www.reporters.net> - under the REPORTERS.NET domain name.

The Reporters Network free E-mail program will allow you to obtain a free, permanent Reporters.net E-mail address, and have your mail automatically forwarded to your current local address. If you change access providers, schools or employers, and your address changes, you simply notify them and they forward your mail to your new address. It's that simple.

ORGIBET SCHOLARS RECEIVE AWARDS

Two Thai journalism students were recently awarded the Orgibet Foundation FCCT Journalism Scholarships and were given an insight into the horrors of the Khmer Rouge Tuol Sleng prison through the BBC documentary *The Secrets of S-21*.



Phansiri Kularb (left) from Uttaradit studies at Chulalongkorn. Tientong Yooveachwattana studies at Thammasat. The scholarships to the two students were handed to them by Orgibet Foundation Chairman George Capps (right).

FRANCES STARNER ADVISORY

Bangkok's oldest resident foreign correspondent, Frances Starnes, remains in the intensive care unit at BNH Hospital (formerly the Bangkok Nursing Home) on Convent Road.

Frances received a wonderful letter-fax from Nayan Chanda at the Far Eastern Economic Review begging her to reconsider her decision to decline medical treatment and food. Thursday, February 20, Frances accepted apple juice, soup and medication for the first time in two weeks and may have changed her mind against early departure....

(UPI) -The Wire Service That Refuses To Die

BY JOHN HAIL

A milestone was reached on Feb. 7 with the closing of the Bangkok Bureau of United Press International after more than 40 years of continuous operation.

But that's not the end of UPI here! Two days earlier, I reached an agreement to continue as UPI-correspondent in Bangkok, only now as a freelance writer.

To mark the no-longer-so-sad occasion, current and former staffers of the beleaguered news agency gathered for a "wake" at the UPI office, located, appropriately, in the middle of the old grave yard in Silom Soi 9.

But for most of those who came to bend elbows among friends on Chinese New Year, it was the UPI Bangkok glory days at the recently demolished U-Chuliang Building on Rama IV Road that monopolized the conversation.

I became a UPI hanger-on the first time I walked into the office in 1976 and legendary UPI correspondent and FCCT stalwart Paul Vogle offered me a drink from the bottle of Mekong he always kept next to his typewriter. Although Paul has been living in Plymouth, Michigan, for the past 15 years, many of his friends still vividly recalled his great stories from Vietnam and Thailand, his kind heart and the esoteric concept of "vogleization." Paul's bureau chief, Alan Dawson, now a sub-editor and computer maven at the Bangkok Post, was remembered for his sparkling copy, wry wit and admonitions to stick to the KISS principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid).

In those days the U-Chuliang Building was the throbbing heart of Bangkok's news scene, with the Bangkok Post, Agence France Presse, Voice of America, Business Times, Kyoto and many other agencies competing to keep up with the hot news from Indochina and the often-hatched Thai coups.

But the greatest rivalry was the one between UPI and Associated Press. Top-notch UPI bureau chiefs like first FCCT president Prasong Wittaya, Robert Udick, Ted Marks, Bob Kaylor, Al Dawson, Sylvana Foa, Paul Anderson and Paul Wedel went head-to-head with the best from AP to win the coveted "logs." As a UPI correspondent in the early 1980s, I recall no greater satisfaction than when we managed to scoop our friends and rivals at AP, particularly the perennial AP bureau chief and FCCT past president Denis Gray.

Although he couldn't make it in person, another legend and former FCCT stalwart, John Mcbeth, recalled some of the good times at the "Ug-chugalug" in an email message from his present perch as Jakarta bureau chief for the Far Eastern Economic Review.

"I think I hardly need say that working at UPI was one of the more enjoyable periods in my journalistic career, thanks to people like you, Al, Paul Vogle (would someone please tell me where the hell he is?), Ted Marks and Bob Kaylor (likewise), Sumalee (best legs in the U-Chuliang Building), Norman (Bottorff) and everyone else who used to wander through when I was there.

"My Worst Moment: walking into a Dawson-less, Vogle-less office at 9 a.m. on what I think was New Year's Day 1979 with the worst hangover in living memory and reading the following message from New York: 'Vietnam invades Cambodia. Where's ours?' That almost equals the time two years later,

Bending elbows at the UPI "wake" from left: freelancer Ken Barrett, former UPI bureau chief Paul Wedel, UPI reporter David Ogan, UPI bureau chief John Hail and DPA bureau chief Peter Janssen.



The legendary Paul Vogle

when Richard Nations called me from Washington to announce there was a coup going on in Bangkok. Yes, I still remember uttering those immortal words: 'What bloody coup?'

"I'll raise a glass to the good times we shared when Bangkok was a real story and when the travelling time to the Thermae was about seven minutes."

One of the UPI Bangkok traditions that survived the 1993 move from the U-Chuliang Building to K.C.C. Building was the close cooperation we enjoyed with a long line of VOA broadcasters, including FCCT former president David Hyatt and Dan Robinson, who left Bangkok last July and now soldiers on as head of VOA's Burmese service from his home in Silver Springs, Maryland.

Danno's recollections reflect the widespread impression that we may not have been the biggest news agency but we had the most fun. "Of all the people in the profession I have had the pleasure of knowing, UPI people have been the best - had the best hearts, written great stories, been great companions on the road and good friends for young correspondents starting out."

Paul Anderson, who presided over the bustling UPI Bangkok Bureau in the early '80s and later became the Asia-Pacific Editor (read: He who must be obeyed), toasted UPI Bangkok from his present home in Hong Kong.

"I, along with many Unipressers and former Unipressers around the world, lament the state of affairs that has led to the closing of one of the most prominent and proud UPI bureaus. The bureau chiefs from the past that I knew personally — Kaylor, Marks, Dawson, Vogle, Foa, Wedel, Barnetson (no doubt I have left someone out and I apologize in advance) — reads like a who's who of great wire service journalists.

"The many other staffers, stringers, cohorts, hangers-on and occasional drop-ins who made the U-Chuliang the lively

and interesting place it was are too numerous to mention, but certainly are remembered fondly on this sad day. Many of us who labored at BKK were fortunate to be in the right place at the right time when Bangkok, at least for us, was the center of the news world. Nancy and I look back frequently and with great fondness on the years we spent in Bangkok, the friends we made, the stories covered. It was a great ride. But its time is past. Let's recall the good times (there were many)."

Anyone who has followed the long-running UPI saga can be forgiven for a certain skepticism to the notion that the agency is finally going under. In the past 20 years it has been in and out of bankruptcy several times and undergone a bewildering series of transformations as Bahais, Mexicans, Evangelical Christians and Arabs, among others, battled to rescue the wire service from oblivion.

In yet another "last ditch" attempt to pull the wire into the black, the current owners are "downsizing" while attempting to tailor the news to the remaining client base, mainly American radio stations. This means UPI's pared-down coterie of correspondents is concentrating on 200-word "rip and read" stories aimed at stateside listeners.

It also means most of the bureaus in the European and Asia-Pacific divisions are closing. In addition to Bangkok, the UPI bureaus in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Sydney, New Delhi, Taipei and Jakarta are calling it a day. The bureaus in Tokyo, Beijing, Hong Kong, Seoul and Manila will sail on, but with skeleton crews.

Meanwhile Bangkok and other Asian capitals with no bureaus will be represented by part-time "stringers," providing scaled-back coverage from their home/offices. According to one UPI executive, the idea is to keep the agency's "pilot light" burning until somebody comes along with the right combination of brains and money to fuel UPI's resurrection.



BASED IN BANGKOK

BY ETHAN CASEY
Freelance Journalist

Photo above:
LANCE WOODRUFF

Photo opposite page:
FAR EASTERN ECONOMIC REVIEW

ETHAN CASEY has been based in Bangkok since 1993. He has covered countries from Pakistan to the Philippines for *The Globe and Mail*, the *South China Morning Post*, and other publications.

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Tracking Megawati

ANDREAS Harsono, *The Nation's* excellent Jakarta correspondent, persuaded me to interview Megawati Sukarnoputri. I didn't need much persuading, of course. Yet on this December trip my attention was very much elsewhere; a U.S.-based magazine had commissioned me to write a 2500-word article on religious tensions and had paid my air fare. Of the several things I wanted to achieve over three weeks, that article had better be my first priority.

The limits on one's own energy and attention span are in fact among the circumstances a travelling journalist constantly must deal with. I've travelled throughout Southeast Asia for *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto and other publications, and each country has been, both fascinatingly and tiringly, its own distinct world. Each country's political situation also is distinct, and deserves respect as such. For the traveller, one almost feels like a different person each time one steps off an airplane: In Cambodia I am Cambodia-Ethan, in Indonesia I'm Indonesia-Ethan.

What this means for my work is that, when I'm living out of a suitcase, I often am fighting a loneliness and even an existential anxiety — Who am I? Why am I here? Where is "here" this week, anyway? — that can be debilitating. The line between the professional and the personal is never clear. The only answer I've yet found is simply to suck it up and tough it out: Right now here is Indonesia, and I'm the guy who'd better make those phone calls if he wants to get those appointments to write those articles to pay the rent.

My trips away from Bangkok last anywhere from one to three weeks, depending on the country, the stories, unforeseen developments, and whether it is my first visit to that particular country. On a first visit, a lot of early work goes into making the right contacts, articulating the right questions, and generally getting the lie of the land. To return a second time — December was my second trip to Indonesia

— has been, for me, in every case a very satisfying experience: I know where I'll be sleeping that first night and whom I will phone the next morning.

Every trip's limited duration is a helpful spur, yet it is important too to cut oneself some slack. Andreas also urged me, rightly, to interview Abdurrahman Wahid — the politically important leader of the Muslim group Nahdlatul Ulama. But, well, there was all this other stuff I had to do. In such a situation I try to tell myself "mai pen rai" and "maybe next time".

Planning ahead is always important, but nowhere more so than in Indonesia. There is on Java a peculiar kind of slowness reflecting a wait-and-see attitude that seems inherent in the culture. (For an insightful introduction to Javanese culture, see *Inside Southeast Asia* by Niels Mulder.) People ask you to phone again; they leave the most important things unsaid; they take the long view. (This, incidentally, is one reason the civil unrest of 1996 must be seen as significant. In, say, Pakistan, the same number of riots in a given year would be par for the course.) So, for covering Indonesia, the first two rules are: Make your first round of phone calls immediately, and ask each contact for the earliest possible appointment.

Getting Megawati's home telephone number was no trouble at all: Andreas Harsono gave it to me. (Andreas and his colleagues at the Institute for the Free Flow of Information — known as ISAI, its Indonesian acronym — are engaged in courageous and intriguing ongoing work for press freedom. My article on this topic was published in *The Globe and Mail* of July 23, 1996.) He'd give it to you too, I'm sure, if you ask nicely. Or you can ask me — nicely. (Other colleagues well worth looking up in Jakarta include Jonathan, Head of the BBC, Patrick Walters of *The Australian*, and Michael Maher of ABC-TV.)

Andreas had warned me to plan on two hours to get from central Jakarta to



"I dragged myself out of bed at six-thirty and into a taxi at seven for my nine o'clock appointment.

I arrived at the large house in a quiet neighbourhood just south of Jakarta's ring road at eight o'clock.

At ten-thirty, Megawati was ready to see me. I knew better than to take offence. But I certainly had plenty of time to formulate my questions."

Megawati's suburban home during the morning rush hour. He knew the city far better than I, and one does not arrive late to appointments with personages of such a stature. Nor does one say, "Perhaps a bit later in the morning ..." So I dragged myself out of bed at six-thirty and into a taxi at seven for my nine o'clock appointment.

I arrived at the large house in a quiet neighbourhood just south of Jakarta's ring road at eight o'clock. At ten-thirty, Megawati was ready to see me. I knew better than to take offence. But I certainly had plenty of time to formulate my questions.

I planned, and still plan, to use the interview in various ways. For starters, I hoped it would run as a straight Q-and-A on *The Nation's* regional page. Internal politics at the paper (another of those things we all have to deal with) resulted in it being axed. I was pleased when, with some effort and luck, I was able to get a 1500-word "profile" into the *Sunday Focus* section (February 2, 1997).

I was less pleased when I saw how it had been edited. So much less pleased was I, in fact, that I kicked a garbage can off a sidewalk into the flow of traffic, barely missing a taxi.

Maybe I overreacted. A few days later I was calm enough to see that the incident raised important and interesting questions: Who should have final authority over the words that see print, the writer or the copy editor? (As a writer, I have my own answer to that question.) Where is the line between "journalism" (which is about facts and news) and "prose" (which is the proprietorial work of a craftsman)? If an interview subject's English is less than perfect, how much license may be taken in changing words to spare him or her embarrassment or to ensure clarity?

These questions are not easily answered. But as journalists, isn't it our first duty always to phrase our response in the form of a question?

PM's 'war game' with the foreign press

Brilliant maneuvering sees
deadly missiles fall across the bow

In the first half of Chavalit's
land-mark 'wargame-with-the-
foreign-press' he takes the lead,
but what will the final score be?

BY MICK VANNISSE
Thailand Times

All Photos:
LANCE WOODRUFF

*W*hatever they say about Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, three things should go up front: his wit, his great sense of humor and his charisma.

This became evident to, when Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh addressed members and guests of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand at the Oriental Hotel for the first time in his role as Prime Minister. At question time - after giving a formal read-out speech, which was without a doubt written by a clever speech writer - it was time to be grilled by the international media representatives; this meant getting down to business. In other words, for us press hounds it was the moment we had all been patiently waiting for.

With the text of the speech already annotated but soon to be thrown in the dust bin, what we were there for was of course not the dinner (despite the hefty price tag), not the speech, but QUESTION TIME.

No matter how well prepared he would be, the PM could now be tested, having thus the opportunity to show his mettle as a strategist, though at the same time running the risk of getting well-and-truly cornered, say, just once or twice. That would be enough to write him off, which in turn would likely trigger off a long series of negatively-slanted media reports - both here and abroad, with the probable final result of

I recall one occasion when Chavalit was surrounded by Thai reporters asking him his reaction regarding the fact that his men had been caught off limits - at a wild party.

*His retort:
"Why didn't they invite me!?"*



"We sit down and talk and discuss how to get rid of money politics. We try to do our best. One of the issues in the drafting of the New Constitution is about money politics; how to get it off."

the sinking of his ship of state. This fate befell at least one of his predecessors. How did Chavalit handle the grilling? He is not a stranger to chairing meetings of importance, and known to be rather witty with unprepared questions from the Thai press while minister of defense, for instance. I recall one occasion when Chavalit was surrounded by Thai reporters asking him for his reaction regarding the fact that his men had been caught off limits - at a wild party. This was about 18 months ago, if I remember correctly. His retort: "Why didn't they invite me!?"

He used to get away with this kind of coy bravado facing the local boys and girls from the media, but how would he handle the reputedly tough questions of foreign press men and women? These much more weathered and differently educated foreign correspondents would never laugh along with such nonsensical evasive joking, no matter how grand the authority of the man in question... and even if they did, they'd sink their fangs into his unprotected side only a second later.

Thus, our ears were pricked up when the first volley was fired by a TV reporter - who's good looks had the potential of distracting the interviewee just long enough to be caught off-guard by her hard-hitting query [referring to Chavalit's many promises to fix up the hurting economy in just two years - when the government must be dissolved to allow for new election - a 'sine qua non' of the New Constitution:

"How will this government achieve all its goals at once? For example, how could this government bring down the interest rate to stimulate the economy when it wants to (also) keep the inflation down and how can you cut spending while, for instance, infrastructure needs to be improved?"

Chavalit - cornered: "Some of the questions I will ask my people to answer... that's leadership..." [Laughter and applause and not a bad maneuver when hit midships. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Amnuay Viravan, sitting at the table next to mine seemed to have prior knowledge that these types of questions would be ricocheted to him. For one, the question did not need to be repeated.

Amnuay: "The interest rate is 5 percent and is compatible with the inflation rate of 10 percent. We should not be look-

ing for a real interest rate of 7 or 8 percent, as it is (presumably he meant 'as things are') today. [To the second question:] Spending which may not be compatible with the efficiency standards as advocated by the Prime Minister will be cut. The people expect us to do this. This may include stepping on many people's toes, but the interest of the country comes first. This also applies to state enterprise spending. So far, what we have canceled amounts to 80 billion baht - over the next two, three years. The idea is not cutting for cutting's sake, we want to get value out of our schedule. Whatever we spend, we'll get value for our money; whatever projects we want to implement would have to be those which will be fruitful for the taxpayer's money..." [Enthusiastic applause.]

Another question on the interest rate for clarification (by another female reporter): It turned the tables to an extent, because the second question overlapped the first. Thus, Amnuay had the chance (and of course took it immediately) to hammer his point home once more and add: "If I can bring down the interest rate substantially, my boss, the Prime Minister, will be very happy..."

[Supportive laughter, followed by muttering by the reporter but killed by Amnuay's remark:] "We shouldn't continue this, you got my answer clear enough." [Murmurs of agreement in the audience.]

The score so far: Midship hit caused minimum damage, followed by a shot that hurt the shooter - the lull giving the 'defense' a chance to consolidate its position with a friendly but (naturally) witty intermezzo by Chavalit underscoring the winning of the first round by saying that he'd like some questions he could actually answer himself, not all of them to be answered by Amnuay... [laughter and applause].

So far so good and to be fair, while the press had their questions well-prepared (and used the said speech for perhaps adding detail) the government was not. In sports, a handicap would be given to the 'disadvantaged' party...

A financial news bureau reporter (although the moderator had specified that correspondents identify themselves clearly, many of them merely mumbled their names): "Most of the people in this room have above average income. All those people in Thailand who maybe didn't get their bonus they had hoped to get this year... and perhaps they won't get the bonus that they're used to next year... what do you say to the people who depend on substantial bonuses to make ends meet... in the coming year, when things may not be as good as expected? What signal did the govern-

Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's three most prominent personality features (or 'pre-fixes') are - apart from his well-documented abilities as a strategist of note:

His wit, his great sense of humor and his charisma. Whether we should add a fourth feature, namely that of true 'statesmanship' has yet to be seen - one month at the helm of the ship of state is simply not long enough. Arguably, his manner indicates that Chavalit would aspire to have that fourth historically important 'pre-fix' added to his name by the time his two-year term is up.

ment send when it decided to make up the shortfall in the case of the Krung Thai Bank? Was that the correct signal to send to the average Thai?"

Chavalit - cornered gain: "Khun Amnuay! Help me!"

Amnuay: "My decision was to pay (the rest of) the bonus (so it would be the same). But this hasn't any effect on other companies. It's an isolated case, because other banks follow their own policy and the Krung Thai Bank is paying what the industry is paying..." [Painful silence, no laughter, no applause, the reply was apparently not sufficiently clarifying to score a hit for the defenders... on the contrary. Coming to the aid of his beleaguered lieutenant, Chavalit offers strategic distraction:]

"We have to stick to what is right and what is wrong. We can't just depend on the mob coming up and ask for something ... not like that." The score for the second round: Negative as far as the defense is concerned; the handicap is being used up.

The next question is about the unequal distribution of income. "Is there a time-frame... you only have another 23 months?"

Chavalit: "This would be very difficult indeed and not only in Thailand but also in many countries. We try to do our best." [The defense is still hurting.]

An African diplomat: "What is the role of Thailand (as part of ASEAN) in helping the developing countries of Africa? You guys have developed much faster. We are being forgotten. Is there any kind of strategy (in Asia) to help Africa to facilitate growth? The Indian Ocean Rim was mentioned in that context (with South Africa leading in its structure) but we need your money..." [next bit drowned out by laughter]... but there is the added notion about a certain moral obligation to assist that continent.

Chavalit [his flag ship has escaped disaster and has found a weakness in the offense - thanks to a 'neutral' third party]:



Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Amnuay Virawan played a crucial role in answering questions concerning the economic policy of the Chavalit government.

"Thailand is also a developing country. But in our capacity we will try to do our best. In the past we would help or protect our neighboring countries. We have to sit down at a round-table and discuss what Thailand can do for your country or your continent..." [Applause and light, approving laughter. An easy one for the defense, but it's a hit, beyond disputation.]

The establishment of the ASEAN TEN is the subject of the next question. "Peace, prosperity and freedom" are, according to the speaker, central issues here.

"When do you think Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar [note: not 'Burma'] will be ready to join ASEAN?" Should their admission be based on their individual degree of progress in political, economic and social development?

Chavalit: "It's a good thing for them to join us - altogether - as soon as possible... so we can help them." [A draw].

This question refers to Chavalit's speech in which he mentioned that the

government was enjoying its 'honeymoon' period with the press.

Chavalit: "We learn from you. You give us the time to do our job. I hope it (the honeymoon) will last two years." [Mild laughter.]

How does he want to be seen as a leader by the international media? [A lethal minefield straight ahead, it's a trap.]

Well, eh, we don't expect to have some [next bit mumbled unclearly, but we are supposed to understand, so I guess, that Chavalit is not trying to lay a smoke-screen]... "we want to be frank with you, to understand each other, that's all we want, no more." [Minefield swept swiftly; trap smartly avoided - a draw].

Question: How will the government organize, balance the books, regarding those big, expensive defense projects?

What we call combat power... one is tangible, the other one intangible. We have to improve the intangible means: (for) good moral and good discipline of the troops."

About the grand (military) projects: "We stopped talking about that a long time (ago) already... when I became Prime Minister [laughter]... we learned enough..."



In the traditional Thai reporters style, Prime Minister, Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was immediately surrounded by the Press, the moment he stepped down from the podium and left for his car.

[Lauder laughter; it's his facial expression and his body language that help significantly in scoring this hit; it seems clear to us that although he would have loved to see these dreams of him come true, he gave them up for the coveted job of Prime Minister - an even bigger dream. The score so far: the defense has taken the lead.]

Time for a deep charge - (Chavalit): "I think we have some people from the Democrat Party here..." [Much laughter; the threat of defeat has become remote.]

Follow-up question: "Is this the same Chavalit as the Deputy Prime Minister (of the previous cabinet)?"

Chavalit: "Wise men have to learn..." [Laughter and applause peak, threatening to blow up my recorder]... "You don't want to see me after this?" [More laughter - The debris of at least one submarine is floating nearby and one destroyer is listing badly - none of this on the defense side.]

Raymond Eaton, businessman, compliments Chavalit on his impressive presentation at the combined chambers of commerce meeting the week before, then poses the question "What would you like the people of Thailand to do to help you and your colleagues to solve the country's problems?" [Again strategic advantage is supplied by a 'neutral agent'... whose side are these guys on?]

Chavalit: "Only one thing, save their money. It was very cheap in the last few

years. Thai people want to go abroad; Singapore, Hong Kong, spend a lot of money. Now they must tighten their belts. About 5, 6 years ago our household savings were 14 percent of GDP, now only 6, 7 percent of GDP."

Question: When will the Prime Minister go to Burma/Myanmar - in regard of the recent trouble there and the ASEAN TEN plans?

"Approximately February or early March. My people will go there first to get all the information. About our policy: we won't touch their internal problems, but we do our best because we consider ourselves as friends. So, friend to friend talk. They also must understand what people are thinking about them."

The Financial Times is next: "It costs a lot of money to be elected and you just said in your speech that public office should not be used for private gain... do you think that those MPs (who supported you) made a bad investment?" [A missile from a powerful destroyer aimed at the bridge.]

Chavalit - after a long pause: "You ask me?" [The projectile flies across the bow and lands in the water, but it was close: two strategy points for the defense, but one also for the question. Steaming ahead unharmed and bolstered by short but very loud applause and laughter, the victorious defender offers a preliminary truce:

"My friend, I think you do understand

what's going on in politics. Not only Thai politicians, but at least 4, 5 countries where I have my friends, politicians who are the big guys also. We sit down and talk and discuss how to get rid of money politics. We try to do our best. One of the issues in the drafting of the New Constitution is about money politics; how to get it off. This problem... so far I find out one solution; as long as the heads of the team do a good job, I think the rest of the people will do the same. In Thai we say; "the problem comes and we have to take responsibility". Thai people need clean and good government. My government... what happened to the last one... cannot happen like that." [Applause; defense intact, morale up, the response was frank, thoughtful, and can only be registered as sincere. There is a total and obvious lack of chicanery. There is also at least a trace of true statesmanship demonstrated, even the most critical political cynic could not deny this.]

What will the final score be? Already new war games are being played, and reportedly 'bad' mistakes have been made since, with for instance, 'the dream team' allegedly torpedoing its own aircraft carrier, Nong Ngu Hao, which is (alleged to be) erroneously targeted as an expense to be cut along with the other super projects.

Synergy

= Takes Thai Media by Storm

It's the new buzz word in the Thai media: Synergy!

Publishers spreading their activities beyond their original business area into television, radio, internet, and cooperation with internationally established media. From established companies like Manager Group and Nation Group to upstarts like City Media, the idea is to capitalize on existing operations and marketing capabilities in order to create a more effective media machine.

City Media has gone into TV with Mekong Movies. Wattachak has entered the international newspaper scene through its recently announced partnership with International Herald Tribune. Soon, the quest for "synergy" will probably have more Thai media companies not already active in other media areas follow in their footsteps. If a new buzz word doesn't take over before then, that is.

After all, trends are met by counter trends.

Text and Photos:
PAMELA HONGSAKUL
Hongsakul Communications

FCCT-Director for Publicity



Metro Magazine's publications director, Ian Crawshaw is enthusiastic about the effect of the synergy between the magazine and the new Metro TV, a joint venture with Mekong Movies.

Competitive edge can be gleaned from effective use of news teams who can cover events for every medium: radio, TV, print and internet, Khun Vichai Tantrativud, Wattachak's executive vice chairman overseeing international business partnerships, explains.

International Herald Tribune's new world strategy being tested in Thailand

The recent acquisition by Wattachak Group of the printing and publishing rights to the International Herald Tribune in Thailand is a textbook example of the new buzz word, synergy. What it takes and what opportunities it presents.

Khun Vichai Tantrativud, Wattachak's executive vice chairman overseeing international business partnerships, explains the motives behind the venture.

"We saw the potential for an increased synergy in our media ventures, and IHT is a good example of the potential and practice of what we are already doing."

According to Khun Vichai, Wattachak is the only media company in Thailand operating its own radio and TV stations, in

addition to Thai and English language daily publications as well as internet news.

"Also," he said, "we have a new printing plant with international class capabilities that we are eager to put to good use."

With the opening of the facilities on February 26, Wattachak Group now await only the approval from the Communications Authority of Thailand before the first locally printed copy of IHT can roll off the presses.

Asked how he can envisage the creation of synergy, Khun Vichai pointed out that competitive edge can be gleaned from effective use of news teams who can cover events for every medium: radio, TV, print and internet.



"We can cut down to just one team gathering the news," he said.

A related concept works in marketing, when one advertising client can place inserts in several media.

"We can go to an advertising agency or product manager and offer a one-stop service for placing ads in print, radio, and TV. Cross-promotions are also possible - for instance, we can write about how a client's new product performs."

"Leveraged Buy Outs as utilized in the 1980's are now giving way to Strategic Alliances in the 1990's," said Khun Vichai. IHT wanted to print in Thailand because of the more timely delivery capabilities, and Wattachak wanted to partner with

an internationally established publication with access to the world leaders. The hoped-for result is that IHT will also have access to Thai leaders through Wattachak and Wattachak will be able to more effectively market IHT locally.

"More than just printing and distributing the paper, we aim to localise the paper for Thailand. This is the first country in the world for IHT's new tactic, and this will be a testing ground for them."

City Media ready to air its new Metro TV-show

Over at the three year old Bangkok Metro Magazine, synergy is being achieved and things are moving fast. Publications Director of City Media (Metro's holding company) Ian Crawshaw talked enthusiastically about their present plans.

"We've just filmed the pilot for our new TV show, it's kind of a punchy, funky young Bangkok entertainment slot, talking about the latest show, events, fashions and social trends. It's a sell-through to our major sponsors," Ian Crawshaw said.

This is part of the company's ambitious plans for expanding into other areas of media.

"We were the first magazine in Thailand to have a web site," says Ian, "but it was never a creative priority. We have now reconstructed the site, making it more fun and interactive, offering users incentives to hit it at least once a month, including gifts and prizes. We just started selling advertising link buttons on the site, and now have four, so in fact Metro Online (bkkmetro.com) is already self-financing."

City Media has recently taken over the building next door to accommodate

for their office expansion. And they are currently recruiting extra staff to handle the growing synergy between the new offshoot companies which include Metro TV, (a joint venture between City Media and Mekong Movies).

Is Metro worried by recent face-lifts of other publications?

"Not really," smiles Ian, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and it can only help our market. We have found and dominated our niche, and we welcome competition at any level. It can only improve standards and quality of publishing in Thailand, which is good not only for consumers and advertisers, but ultimately for us, the publishers. We're all in this together, guys!"

Ian has posted on his wall a three point summary of Metro's key management principles: 1) Know who your customers are and what they want. 2) Narrow your focus. And 3) Dominate a market. With the popularity of the magazine, it seems that Metro is being quite successful in practising what they preach.

Wednesdays

The Legacy of the

By MICHELE ZACK
Independent Writer

All photos from 1973:
COURTESY OF THAIRATH DAILY

In a country not known for ideological passion, Thailand in the 70s went through the most fervent outpouring of political sentiment of its modern history, particularly on the left. The right wing struck back, and Thailand has been forever marked by the events and voices of that tumultuous decade, particularly those which made the news in October of 1973 and 1976.

An FCCT Wednesday Night Program looked back at those times in an effort to assess their impact, 20 years later, on Thailand today.

Dr. Thongchai Winichakul, now at the University of Wisconsin, was the evening's special guest. He was in town to speak at a two-day commemorative program and photo exhibit held at Thammasat University to mark the tragedy of Oct. 6, 1976.

Dr. Thongchai was a student leader arrested that day, who was tried with several others, all of whom saw charges against them dropped. Although he has chosen to

live and work in the US, he has devoted much of his personal and professional life to analyzing the seventies and the student democracy movement, and to trying to appropriately memorialize those who died in the most brutal political violence ever seen in Thailand. He is also concerned with healing those who lived through it.

"We lost two wars, first in Bangkok when the democracy movement was squashed and Thai students were dehumanized, and then in the jungle when we realized our sacrifice was for a lost cause, and that the goals of the Thai Communist Party and the student movement were not the same," Thongchai says now.

Most of the thousands of students and others who were involved have chosen to deal with the traumas of the 70s in the same way the government has: with silence. According to Thongchai, the students suffered the ambivalence of most victims, who feel guilty for the crimes committed against them. The official silence on the subject, while culturally not surprising, has made it

difficult for them and the country as a whole to integrate and move beyond the trauma. "It doesn't go away for many of us," Thongchai told the hushed audience at the FCCT.

Disturbing, explicit motion picture footage from the Reuters archives was shown with live commentary from Dr. Thongchai. Derek Williams, sound man with CBS News who covered the siege of Thammasat, also spoke about his impressions of the day. Dr. Yuangrat Wedel rounded up the panel with an account of her doctoral thesis research which followed up on 20 student leaders who fled to the jungle after the violence, and then re-entered Thai society after amnesty was given in the late seventies.

What those who were involved are doing now, how their lives and work have affected Thailand, and the extent to which they have kept (or lost) their faith tells a lot about the why and how of Thailand's development over the past 20 years.

Following is a brief history and background on Thailand in the 70s, and some capsules and comments from people today looking back.

THE HISTORY

Pro-democracy activities and internal insurgencies peaked in Thailand during the 70s; inevitably both were associated with communism. Thailand's right-wing military-led government, cold war politics, the Vietnam war, Chinese communist support for guerrilla activities, and neighboring Communist regimes assured this link would be made.

Thailand had a small Communist party (CPT) of its own since the 1950s. And several leaders

responsible for the country's move from absolute to constitutional monarchy in 1932 and subsequent political development were educated abroad and influenced by Marx and the socialist movement in Europe. Many nationalists were branded communists for political purposes some, such as Dr. Pridi Banomyong, died in exile.

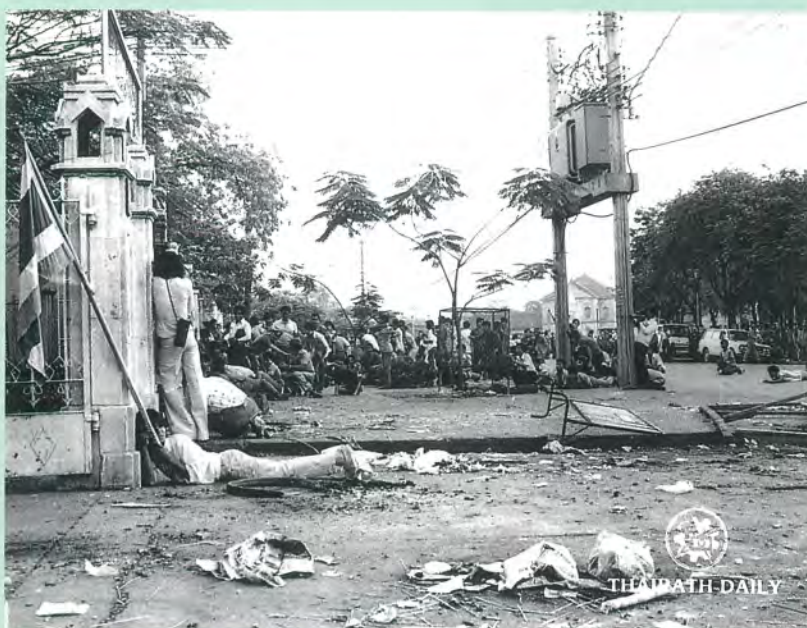
While the seeds planted in Thailand never took root in the form of a mass Communist movement, Mao Tsetung Thought and Chinese Communism were significant forces influencing both the armed insurgencies of the 60s and 70s (dominated by Chinese-Thai CPT members), and the much more broadly based pro-democracy student movement.

The CPT collapsed by the early 80s when outside funding ended and the Thai and Chinese governments began to cooperate. Amnesty was offered to soldiers and activists who had gone to the jungle to fight for revolution, and they began the difficult journey back from the jungle to rejoin society.



An FCCT Wednesday Night Program earlier this year looked back at the tumultuous events of 1973 and 1976 in an effort to assess their impact, 20 years later, on Thailand today.

"It doesn't go away for many of us," Dr. Thongchai Winichakul, now at the University of Wisconsin, told the hushed audience.



... and the People

Supang Povatong, a journalist was arrested Oct. 20, 1957 in a round-up of journalists and others suspected of being communists, staged by then-Prime Minister Field Marshal Sarit. She was held for 11 months without trial at the Police Officers Club. She was allowed to continue working (at half pay) and says "I enjoyed my time in jail, I had a ring-side seat. Most of us detained weren't communists, Field Marshal Sarit just used communism to round up anyone who didn't like his government. He also wanted to show the US that Thailand was anti-red — he wanted money from them so it was all very convenient."

Because of her "ring-side seat" Supang scooped other newspapers when Supachai Sisati, detained with her, was executed for being a communist. "He wasn't," says Supang, "maybe he knew the word, and claimed he was, but like most of us, what he wanted was some attention for his ideas on political and social change. It was the same with the students and farmers who went to the jungle in 1976, very few were communists, but they were naive, used some of the slogans, and in turn were used by the communists."

One friend Supang made in the peace movement that began in 1954 at Thammasat University, was a communist, Plueng Wannasi, an early leader of the CPT who was exiled to China in 1958 with his wife. He died of a heart attack there recently, just after receiving permission to return to Thailand. His widow and his considerable library have returned to Thailand.

Samai Arbhabhram and her more well-known husband Anuj, pro-democracy activists involved in publishing, left home and their one-year-old daughter for work as usual the morning of Oct. 6, 1976, but didn't return home until 1981. They escaped to the Thai jungle separately after the mass killing of students and other demonstrators at Thammasat University that day, and Samai was re-united a year and a half later with her husband after marching with Hmong tribe members to meet him in China.

"You have to consider the situation at that time, leftist thinking had become very popular as a new way to interpret social problems it was a soul-searching, anti-



establishment era. We had good intentions to help society, but we didn't understand all the alternatives.

"In 1972 Mao Tsetung thought was very secret and exciting a way to change the world for the better.

"Influenced by Mao thought, the CPT interpreted Thai society as semi-feudal and semi-subordinated to imperialist rule. We studied dialectical materialism, and thought that all history up to the time could be explained by this theory, and that we were engaged in the last fight."

As the movement developed, however, she found that "deep down, we didn't like the Chinese, and conflicts arose with the 'pure communists' when we realized they wanted to import Mao thought and indoctrinate Thailand without studying the situation here first.

Once in the jungle, more conflicts arose between the doctrinaire insurgents, and the mostly student intellectuals who had joined them in the wake of October 6th's violence.

"In the beginning we were very good together, like a honeymoon. A CPT farmer guerrilla was in charge, comrade something, and he was a good leader, kind and modest. But when things got more dangerous and the government soldiers were shooting at us, trying to eliminate us we had to move and march all the time the fear and the conflicts grew. The CPT would say 'move here, go there' with no explanation, and the students became annoyed. The CPT were soldiers, and they said 'you must believe and follow orders.' This was in line with the CPT discipline and Mao thought that the individual is subordinate to the or-

tee and I realized it was just another form of dictatorship."

Tawon Liang (who now uses a different name) fled to the jungle after witnessing students being hung, tortured, and burned alive the morning of Oct. 6, 1976. A communications graduate from Chulalongkorn, he was a volunteer working with farmers in Dr. Puey Ungpakorn's Volunteer Graduate Program, patterned after the American Peace Corps.

"After that, I couldn't go back to work because I might be killed. I went to say good-bye to my family, because I

jungle five or 10 years and who had been to China for training.

"We were weak, we didn't have the will to fight. Our opinion is that the farmers [guerrillas] don't think, just follow orders."

In 1980, Tawon returned to Bangkok, changed his name, and worked a further two years with the CPT to help it resolve conflicts with the Lao Communists who had withdrawn financial and military support.

"By then, most students thought Chinese Communism isn't suitable for Thailand, we wanted to reform the CPT. We

have fears of control by China, although we still thought the ideas of Mao Tsetung were good."

But the CPT fell apart as the political situation in Thailand improved, Chinese funding dried up, and the insurgents accepted the government's offer of amnesty in increasing numbers.

"I am proud, not sorry, about my time and experiences with the democracy movement and CPT. Now students are not a force, they don't care about society, just shopping and having fun. It makes me sad.

"My old friends and I still get together, talk and comment, and we were all there at the May [1992] events. My friends made a video and we distributed it so people can see how their government behaves. I still have my books, Mao thoughts, and other books, and I get them out sometime.

"I have tapes of all the revolutionary songs, and my wife and I sing them in the car. Our revolution was not successful, so now I compromise. I am involved in the employee organization at work, and I was elected to represent my group. In my work, I also try to get my [financial] institution to do corporate philanthropy.

thought I might never be able to join society again. Many students went, and we were sincere in wanting to help the people.

"In the jungle, we learned about Mao Tsetung and Marxism in study groups. It seemed to have the basis that all people are equal. We wanted the government to represent the people, not just the military, so that the horrible things I'd seen at Thammasat could never happen again."

He lived in the jungle near Surathani, "the area of the CPT's strongest local support. The people helped us hide from government troops and had a lot of respect for us. We also had contact with the Malay Communists. In the North and Northeast of Thailand, the CPT relied on support from Laos and China, but we didn't need it so much."

As the situation became more dangerous, however, Tawon reported conflicts between the students and the tougher insurgents, whose leaders had been in the

organization, but we were middle-class intellectuals, not hardened soldiers, so things started to break down."

After marching through Thailand to China (with a 4-month political/military training course in Nan which included heavy indoctrination in Mao thought) and being reunited with her husband in a Thai compound in Kunming, the conflicts continued.

"I began to feel disappointed in the leadership, to notice they have some defects, and not enough knowledge. I wonder how they will manage the government if they topple down the old system. Most of the Thais in high positions in the CPT were Chinese, and when I questioned this or anything else the leaders took me aside and would repeat doctrines about everything being subordinate to the Central Commit-

THAIRATH DAILY

THOSE WERE THE NIGHTS

By PHILIPPE DECAUX

All photos: LANCE WOODRUFF

The F.C.C.T. in the past used to organize fun-runs for its sports-minded members. But since last year, the Club has moved into the international scene with a totally different form of fun-run, probably not recommended by the Olympic Committee, but certainly approved by the diplomats posted in the Kingdom.

A fun-run joined by fans of exotic cuisine, yet to be discovered wines and liqueurs, and above all landscapes, music and from sometimes faraway lands. And the organizers, Ambassadors and wives, cultural, commercial and cultural attaches are all dedicated to one goal: Showing their country at its best.

Could you picture such examples of dedication anywhere else:

- Madame Kelthum, wife of Brazilian Ambassador Arnaldo Carrilho, cooking Brazilian delicacies at her residence for 160 people?

- Cambodian Consul Heng Vuddhara returning from the border with cases of Angkor Beer?

- Madame Irina Bostorin supervising for two days the creation of a typical Russian buffet at La Genna?

- Chuljun Yu, 1st secretary of the Korean Embassy, bringing a cast of 20 children from Seoul's famous "Little Peace" - singers?

...the list is too long for this page, but all members present at the Embassy Nights have all shown their gratitude to those who made a success of their nights. And the "Around the World with the FCCT"-crusade will go on, no jetlag, but a lot of friendship and discovery involved. This is the aim of our Club.



← Princess Norodom Rattana Devi presents a Business Class return ticket to Angkor Wat, courtesy of Royal Air Cambodge to a western Apsara.



↑ In a typical revolutionary hand-shake, HE Antonio Danza Cigas, Cuban Ambassador and Philip Blenkinsop, author of the now famous book, "The Cars That Ate Bangkok".

← Club manager Khun Panjavilai becoming an expert in Russian "blinis" while William Kiehl of USIS considers using her talents for a Burger party.



↑ Old comrades under the protection of the Kingdom of Cambodia Flag. HE Roland Eng being congratulated by Don Felipe on his fantastic Cambodian Night.

The Russian Ambassador, Oleg. V. Bostorin's wife offers a chance to study Russian Culture to occasional militiaman Cebren C.B. Toney, an otherwise very serious diplo at the U.S. Embassy



...someone told me...

FARIDAH HAMID, after several years as a travel writer in Bangkok, has recently moved to Ohio, USA. When confronted with rumours, that she had found her dream prince and was going to marry and live in Ohio happily ever after, Faridah was quite tightlipped. When urged to tell, who the lucky guy was, her smiling reply was: "An american..."



Faridah Hamid hiding behind a bottle of wine at one of the recent Embassy nights at the FCCT.

Two nights after the media-intensive launch of Planet Hollywood in Bangkok, Khmer Rouge expert **NATE THAYER** was investigating the Patpong strip and its various launching pads when he was pounced upon by a nest of groupies grabbing any piece of meat or cloth available on his lean body (sorry, no scalp to grab) and begging him to sign autographs on the spot.

Further investigation revealed that the groupies (maidens, not-so maidens and transvestites alike) had mistaken Nate for none other than Hollywood "action-packed" star and singer Bruce Willis, whose behavior in the City of Angels has been the source of much idol gossip.

Nate, in a recent and exclusive interview for Dateline Bangkok, said he did not take advantage of the situation in any way. Furthermore, he proposed to sing "Ain't Misbehavin'" for a special event at the club to prove that his voice is even better than Willis'.

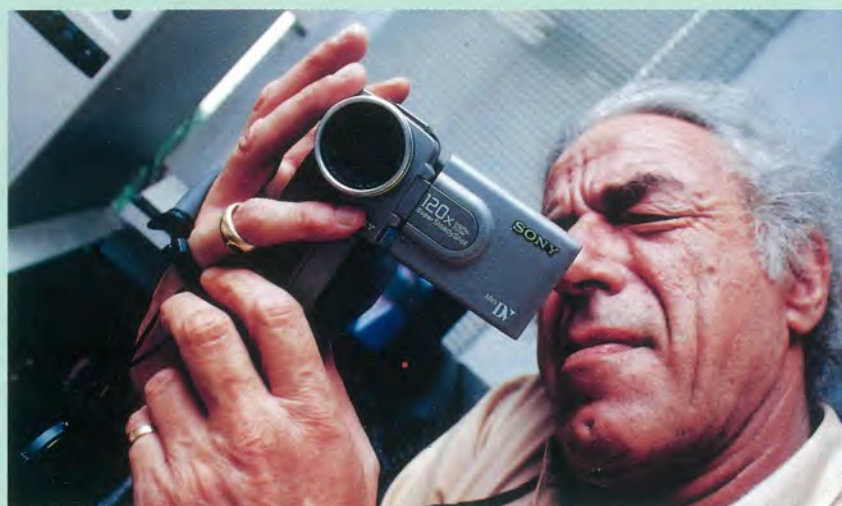
CHRISTER NILSSON, correspondent for a number of magazines and newspapers in Sweden, has gone legal. By year end 1996, he completed the long journey of establishing a Thai registered company, Media Partner Co., Ltd. That done, his first priority was to apply for a work permit for his position in this company. And got it.

Untouchable as he now is, Christer will continue his reporting back to Sweden, but has added PR assistance to his services.

Christer Nilsson - the legal version.



...and more will follow!



Agent 007-Decaux with the new Sony DCR-PC7A video camera - excellent for stealth shots.

Photo:
LANCE WOODRUFF

New ultra-light, ultra-compact digital Handycam from Sony perfect for undercover reporting

Let's imagine your name is Agent DCR-PC7A, and you are about to witness the forced feeding of Komodo dragons by members of a weird mafia dedicated to the production and smuggling of dragon-livers (better for sex than goose liver as all senile experts will tell you) and you need to be a ghost while recording this horrendous event for the WOOF (World Wildlife Fund) to See and Sue, thereafter bringing the nasty culprits to Court and an end to this exploitation of endangered species, - well, here is your Jamie Bondsie tool: The new ultra-light, ultra-compact digital Handycam produced by the Sony brothers (if any on the succession list) the DCR-PC7E.

Priced in Thailand where it will soon hit the market at around 50,000 baht, this lovely investment - it feels really ergonomic - can easily fit under your armpit (provid-

ing you do not overly sweat, else the humidity safety will abort any recording) or in through your fingers, looking like a deep blue sapphire (if you train yourself as a ring showing-off mogul), this camcorder can tape events and related sounds in all types of conditions even under extremely low-light, all this with a newly developed info Lithium Battery lasting for at least 80 minutes. It has a digital zoom power of 120 times, but you better put 20 pounds of sandbags on your tripod before you tape anything on this focal length, even with the Steady-Shot system doing wonder in rough 4x4 driving situations.

The tape is the size of a condom-box which helps getting through customs as I have never seen any Customs Official playing with those essential goodies outside of your body. They do respect them and will think you are a responsible Man -

Woman (Dr. Meechai, please sponsor the Club)!

And when you are back in the comfort of your mosquito net, still with your lovely baby-cam, you can either watch your Killing Sequences on the LCD screen attached and write your script or dump the best frozen frames onto your notebook (thanks to a special cable) for a quick faxed report to Base.

Correspondents, Journalists, Associates, Overseas, Country, NGO, and Embassies Members, this is the gadget of the year to get your visual messages through to the FCCT-nights. And the Programme Committee will not - I warrant for that one - censor your videos unless extremely perverse.

Don Felipe - El Presidente



The FCCT News Service was recently used by the Phnom Penh Film Festival. Nowhere in Bangkok are reporters' needs more accommodated than at the Club. (Photo: Lance Woodruff)

Free Service when planning Press meetings at the FCCT

FCCT has launched a new service, free of charge to all embassies, government institutions, NGO's and private companies, who organize their Press conferences, promotion events or product introductions at the FCCT Club House.

The "FCCT News Service" takes complete care of distributing the Press release and Press invitation prior to the event by way of email, fax and postal service, thereby utilizing the probably most prestigious media list available in Thailand.

The high credibility of the FCCT and its long experience in catching the attention of the media and facilitate reporters needs will add value to any event and help secure a maximum Press coverage.

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- Video taping of the whole event for

your own reference after the Press meeting, allowing you to analyse the event for follow-up contacts with the media.

- Permanently installed sound system allowing reporters to tap the speakers directly from the studio quality microphone and tape questions from reporters.

- Computers and modem ports permanently available for wire service reporters or news paper reporters on tight deadlines.

- First class food and beverage catering, offering a variety of international cuisine, attended by the Club's own staff, familiar with serving at media events.

The FCCT News Service was recently used by the Phnom Penh Film Festival and will be used for The Russian Embassy and Aeroflot's launch of Moscow's 850 anniversary contest and two coming Press conferences to be held by the Polish Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister of Lebanon during their upcoming visits to Thailand.

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Planet Hollywood Storms Through Bangkok

PUBLIC - from the receiving end... RELATIONS

BY SCOTT ROSENBERG
SE Asia Correspondent
The Hollywood Reporter
Bangkok, Thailand
February, 1997



Herded onto the side lines by the staffers of the War Room (their expression, not mine!), press were forced to mingle with the 3,000 or so other fans waiting to catch a look at the glitz and glimmer that only Hollywood can offer, while the talent were steered toward the looming eye of the CNN camera.

Marching to the tune of George Frederic Handel's "Ariodante - Overture" (or some such similar tune), the Planet Hollywood army came marching into Bangkok January 24th to launch the opening of their new restaurant, the 36th in their worldwide chain.

For those of you that do not know, Planet Hollywood is the world's only dining experience inspired by the world of film and television. Originated by "Sophie's Choice" and "9 1/2 Weeks" producer Keith Barish and restaurateur Robert Earl, the project was launched in New York in October 1991 with shareholders Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Demi Moore adding a powerful star boost.

But back to the Regent Hotel, where the self-empowered event staff sent in from Los Angeles bunkered into their "War Room" (their term not mine), to bring a little bit of Hollywood to upcountry Bangkok.

"Nein," they said to this reporter as he tried to enter the "private-party" at the Regent. It did not matter that an invitation had been granted by one of the owners ("He is only a minority owner," they insisted.)

And in front of the restaurant, fellow reporters were told, "This is for talent and invited guests only!" Pleas to Planet Hollywood, (Regional Commander?), Regional Operations Director Michael Brunner fell on deaf ears. "Get off or we will have you escorted off," we were warned. Meanwhile the glamour of Bangkok's elite marched on by, cell-phones in hand.

Herded onto the sidelines, press were forced to mingle with the 3,000 or so other fans waiting to catch a look at the glitz and glimmer that only Hollywood can offer.

"Heil Wes", "Heil Jackie", "Heil, Jean-Claude and Cindy, Bruce and Sly". The crowd roared as the MC's for the evening screamed inane comments to the crowd.

"This way, this way", the talent were steered toward the looming eye of the CNN camera. Revered by the War Room Staff, Bangkok's very own Tom Mintier was accorded the honor of chatting with the stars in front of the camera. Tom muttered "What a low power presentation" in response to this reporter's question on his views of press handling at the event.

And this reporter, the eyes and the ears of the Hollywood establishment in S.E. Asia, was rewarded for his steadfast support of their pre-event efforts, with a coveted spot next to Tom Mintier.

Never mind the dozen or so local journalists jostling for position and screaming for autographs; "So Bruce, what do you think of Bangkok after just having opened Singapore (P.H. Singapore opened two days before Bangkok)," this reporter stammered.

"You came all the way from L.A. to cover this, that's neat," Bruce Willis responded as he was moved along and probably heard no more than "Hollywood Reporter," come blabbering out of my mouth.

And when the procession ended, and Bruce Willis' band began wailing out, Bangkok's finest were invited inside the restaurant.

But once again, War Room staffers and their Thai Army bodyguards (the real army guys) yelled "Nein," as reporters tried to enter what was hyped as the party of the year. Those of us that did manage to get through were forced to congregate on the first floor of the restaurant, while owners and other hangers-on got to climb to the second floor, where the "stars" hung.

On the way to claim our car, parked three blocks away, we were stopped by an older woman hawking her wares along Rachadamri Road. "Can you get me one of these?" she said as she gestured at my son's Planet Hollywood—Singapore T-shirt. "I want to look important too," she added.

"Important," this reporter chuckled. Why didn't someone tell the P.H. army that?



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