

DATELINE

A photograph of a person with long dark hair, wearing a dark t-shirt with a red star and crescent and green pants, holding a large Indonesian flag (red and white) on a bamboo pole. The person is looking upwards. In the background, there is a large, dark, cylindrical structure that appears to be burning or smoking, with flames visible at the base. The scene is outdoors, possibly on a street or in a park.

BANGKOK

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

MAGAZINE

FOURTH QUARTER 2000

Indonesian Media Officials in Limbo

A Father's Anguish

A Good Fight

Taking on 'dark influences'

Plus:

The latest FCCT Trips

and a peek at February's photo exhibition

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Contents

THIRD QUARTER 2000

COLUMNS

8 CLUBBING

President's last words, Ode to Khun Vilai, and
Soi Whispers.

9 THE BUSINESS

Bangkok Post gets a new leader, Media Madness
Again, and Pioneer of Broadcast News Dies.



FEATURES

10 A FATHER'S ANGUISH

Winning my daughter back from the child snatchers.
By Robin W Martin.



COVER STORY

14 IN INDONESIA

They used to issue Indonesian
press identification cards to the
dozens of foreign correspondents
in Jakarta. But now, they are in a
state of limbo, writes Richard S.
Ehrlich

16 A GOOD FIGHT

Outspoken newspaper editor Amnat Khunyoosing
survived the gunshot intended to take his life. Now he
is fighting to keep justice alive. By Lin Neumann.

18 PRESS GAG AT THE SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST?



20 A CAMPING TRIP

Journalist survives a weekend out in the woods with the kids.

22 FCCT IN CAMBODIA

Latest attraction in the greater-Angkor region is Phnom Kulen.
Phil Cornwel-Smith reviews its famous falls, reclining Buddha
and river of the lingams ahead of an FCCT trip to the area.

24 FCCT'S FEBRUARY PHOTO EXHIBITION

Join Us

You don't have to be foreign and you don't need to be a correspondent to become a member of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand. Membership has its privileges: The club frequently hosts news breaking panel discussions with the leaders of government, private sector and non-governmental organizations. Each month the club exhibits work from a different photographer and every Friday there is live jazz music at the bar. Each member also gets a subscription to this magazine for absolutely free. So why aren't you a member? Don't forget that the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand is one of Bangkok's most prestigious addresses for press conferences, social gatherings and product launches. The club is outfitted with all the latest techno-gizmos, from wireless microphones to remote control television cameras, and can provide all types of catering, from light snacks to full meals. Impress your guests with the well known hospitality of the Foreign Correspondents Club.

Got a tale to tell?

This is your club's magazine and we welcome letters to the editor, articles, photographs, drawings, poetry or just about anything to help us fill up each issue. Submissions should address journalism or the story behind getting the story. All ideas considered, but please contact Thomas Crampton before doing too much work. Submissions are paid for with glory and bar coupons.

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Last Words from the Prez

PRESIDENT DESK



Dear Members and Friends of the FCCT,

Usually the last message of the year is a garden full of roses and kudos... Unhappily, not this year as, even if 2000 started on the right wheels with Thomas Crampton at the steering and an addendum of steam with the 1st Train trip inside Cambodia, the reality of economics became pretty harsh when I had to take over in July. Although the Sri-Lanka trip was a Press success, it only brought a few badly needed satangs.

Yet, the lack of interest for the Club by elected Board Members really showed when we soon realized that we were only a few really working for the good of the FCCT.

To those, the roses and kudos, namely, Jeanne Hallacy who, without help from any Committee maintained a high level of programmes; to Sylvia Saw-McKaige, who again, alone, edited Dateline; to Khun Tim, our Landlord, although not on the Executive Committee who has generously agreed to considerably lower the rent by 35% for the next 3 years, a bonus for the new Boards; to Domenica Plantedosi, who joined as Treasurer in July and fought against private interests to keep the Club afloat with revenues and has now resigned out of disgust for being voted out on this issue; finally to Khun Panjavilai Song-Im, our beloved Manager who went

into so many battles for the same purposes and I am sad to say, has also tendered her resignation.

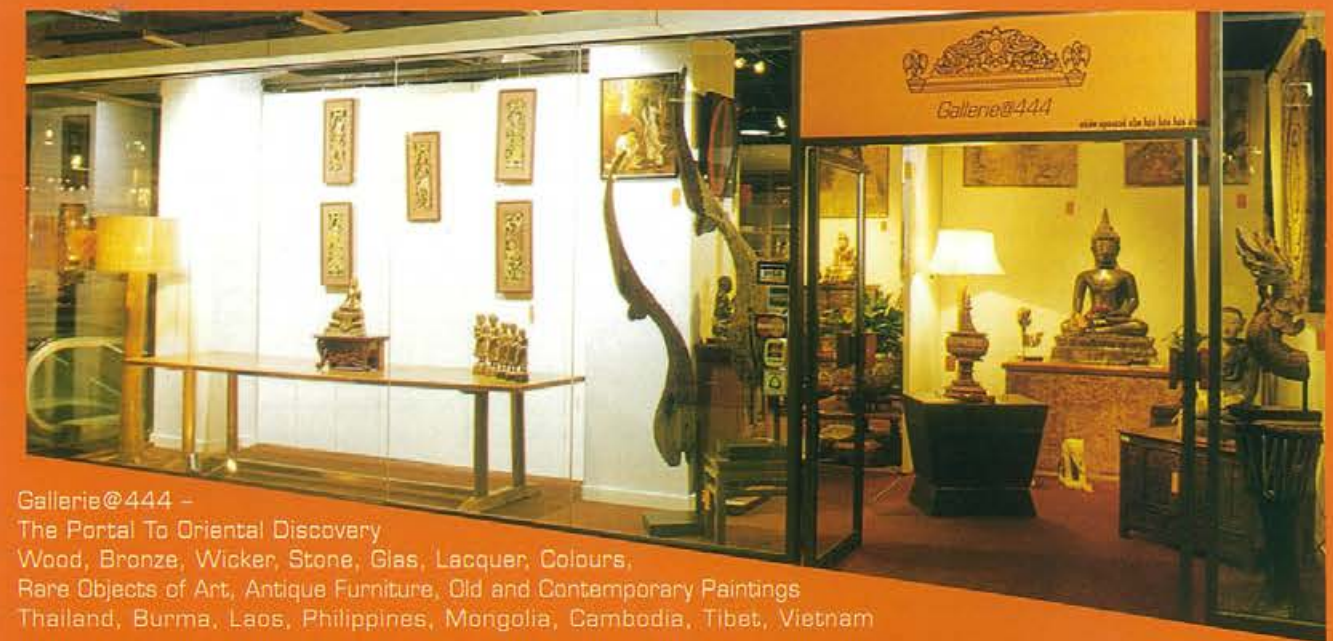
This deplorable state of affairs is also due to the practically permanent politicking, and back stabbing going on in the corridors of the Maneeya Building, without forgetting some Board members taking advantage of their position for their own commercial ventures within the Club premises...

Certainly no incentives for those giving much of their time and efforts to keep the Club alive and financially healthy.

The only recommendation I can now offer for the next elections and the future, is that a majority of voting Members attend the next AGM and seriously consider the personalities of each candidate vying for posts and evaluate on their purposes and intents, before deciding on any vote.

A dedicated and hard working Executive Committee is of the essence if You, as I, wish to see a prosperous F.C.C.T. in 2001 and beyond

Philippe Decaux.



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General Election 2001

The joint FCCT-Government Public Relations Department Press Conference was held at the FCCT on Dec. 14. The press conference was on Thailand's General Elections 2001, and was well attended by nearly 50 foreign correspondents, Thai press and local television channels.



Getting to know the system better

From left: Mr. Gothorn Arya, Election Commissioner, Mr. Yuwanut Garmoljev, Election Commissioner, and Mr. Piyasati Amranand, Director General of the Public Relations Department.

SOI WHISPERS

This Just In: Vote-buying in Thailand. ABC Australia reporter Geoff Thompson got more news than he bargained for when the ABC program Foreign Correspondent aired his documentary, **Thailand: The Price of Democracy.** The Nation newspaper jumped all over the story because of a sequence involving vote buying and the Thai Rak Thai party. At one point the paper published front-page (but below the fold) frame grabs of Thompson's mug from a stand-up in the piece and boldly declared Thai Rak Thai was 'at war with the ABC'. Our intrepid reporter stood by his story and the whole thing fizzled faster than you can say Thaksin Shinawatra, who, by the way, didn't send the ABC a Christmas card this year. **Of Flooding Brothels and Brave Men.** TCS (Television Corporation of Singapore) bingo caller Roman Bose was something of a city-state hero during the recent floods in Hat Yai. Fearless Bose and crew were covering the story when the Singapore embassy in Bangkok somehow, somehow, deputized Bose (sounds scary!) and designated him the point-man for stranded Singaporeans trying to get back home. And he was leading the nightly newscasts. **Kinda' Like Our Own Jerry Lewis.** Extreme photographer Phillip Blenkinsop is back in the Big Mango after an extended stay in Paris. According to unbiased accounts, the British-born Australia-raised lens-man has achieved cult status in the French photography world after several high-profile shows. A second book (who can forget *The Cars That Ate Bangkok?*) is close to printing and focuses on the darker side of The Kingdom. **And She's Taller Now Too.** ABC Australia Jakarta correspondent -formerly based in Bangkok - Ginny Stein found herself in a Singaporean hospital after seriously hurting her back out on the job. Stein, who is no fan of law and order, put aside her regional biases for treatment that involved being put in traction. As soon as she could walk again Stein found a back door so she could slip out for an occasional smoke. **Welcome to the Machine.** ITN's Channel 3 is moving its regional bureau from Hong Kong to Bangkok and is taking a space right next door to their sister ITV station Channel 4 (confused yet?) on the Penthouse floor at the Maneeya Center. Word is the competition between the sister stations surpasses what's supposed to be the real competition, the BBC, which is right across the hall. **Big Wheel Keeps on Turning.** Continuing ebb and flow in journaland. CNBC's

Ode To Khun Panjavilai

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand is sad to bid farewell to a person whose presence has become part of the inner heartbeat of the Club. After two decades of dedicated service as the Manager of the FCCT, Khun Panjavilai is moving on.

Vilai's role in keeping the Club together is not fully known as her gentle (but very strong) nature never demanded laurels for her skills in handling the multitude of details in running the facility.

In addition to the management of the food and beverage, the bar staff and overseeing all the accounting and bookkeeping, Vilai demonstrated great finesse in welcoming new members dropping by the Club for information, liaised with public relations folks, oversaw all logistics for the overseas trips and managed the administration of the office.

Vilai also provided invaluable assistance with Program nights - juggling the ever-changing calendar, confirming guests and chasing up details for the evenings and preparing the agendas and minutes for the Board meetings.

This all on top of her duties as a mom - rushing off from the Maneeya Center to fetch



Last hours at her desk

her son from school or send her daughter to activities.

Vilai is the epitome of professionalism: a sharp minded manager, classic dresser, quick to smile and model of grace.

We would all like to express our most sincere gratitude for her years of devotion to the FCCT and our respect for her ability to present a placid and lovely mirror in the midst of what was at times a taxing atmosphere.

Vilai, "khap khun kha", and may your talents shine in all your future endeavors.



Michelle Cheung is moving to Singapore where she'll continue to work at the broadcaster's regional headquarters as a producer/correspondent. Her significant other and part-time AsiaWorker Doug Earl has landed a job at Reuters in Singapore. Former BBC Jakarta bureau chief Jonathan Head is now based in Bangkok for the beeb, replacing Simon Ingram who is taking a year out of the mother corp to freelance in Bangkok. Angela Takats, formally from Channel 9 Australia joined Reuters Television, Thailand as junior producer. And over at print land, Reuters Thailand added two new correspondents - Po Garden, formally from Nation TV, and Dominic Whiting, formally the press and information officer of the European Commission in Thailand. Umesh Pandey, former Bangkok Post, and Reuters Thailand, makes another move. This time, to The Asian Wall Street Journal as a staff reporter. Kudos to Chanyaporn Chanjaroen, the first Thai reporter from Dow Jones News Wire Bangkok, to be assigned to the Singapore office as a regional reporter covering industrial metals. Jenny Paris, former bureau chief of Dow Jones News Wires in Athens, Greece is now the new bureau chief of DJNW in Bangkok. **Intrepid Cameraman Finally Meets His Match.** Trekking through the Cambodian jungles to the Khmer Rouge headquarters is considered a small feat for Marc Laban of AsiaWorks when compared with what he had to face at Khao Yai National Park. A recent Animal Planet shoot required Marc to film his greatest fear - Monkeys. Initially he refused to get out of the car, but professionalism and relentless ribbing from his colleagues finally got the better of him. He overcame his pet fear, and filmed the "crazed murderous primates". The monkeys couldn't be reached for comment. **Quiet at the Back of the Bar Please.** The talented stills photographer Nick Rain rocked the club recently at an ILO program on child labour. After spending all day meticulously decorating the club with his powerful ILO photos of kids on the job (and maybe throwing a few back), Rain got, well, emotionally involved in the program and was shouting obscenities at the participants which included ILO honchos, a Thai technocrat and Father Joe. Several people attempted to calm him down in succession with no results. The verbal barrage was greeted by the sound of one man clapping. Father Joe, naturally.



Robert Trout, 91, Pioneer of Broadcast News, Dies

Robert Trout, 91, a pioneering broadcast journalist who was admired for the ease with which he adlibbed his way through some of the century's most important breaking news reports, died in Manhattan, in November.

Mr. Trout, whose career spanned nearly 70 years, was often referred to as one of "Morrow's Boys," a select group of reporters hired by Edward R. Morrow in the mid-1930s, when Mr. Morrow began to assemble what would become, over the next few decades, CBS's vaunted news division.

Mr. Trout actually preceded Mr. Morrow at CBS. He was hired in 1931 by a small station in Alexandria, Virginia, that was acquired by CBS the next year.

Yet it was as members of the Morrow team, known for its literate and probing commentary even on tight deadlines, that Mr. Trout and others like him made their careers.

Few could equal Mr. Trout, a quick study who became known in the business as the "iron man" for his ability to stay with an issue and give it all it required.

The legends about Mr. Trout's resourcefulness were grounded in reality. For example, when he covered the Allied invasion of France

on D-Day, he did, in fact, make 35 broadcasts in 24 hours and was on the air for one solid stretch of 7 hours and 18 minutes, telling Americans about the extraordinary events he saw unfolding before his eyes. And it was he whom CBS listeners heard on V-E Day, saying, "This is the end of the Second World War."

In the 1930s he extemporaneously covered a series of events. In less than one year, from December 1936 to September 1937, they included the coronation of King George VI; the marriage of Wallis Warfield Simpson, an American, to the Duke of Windsor, who as Edward VIII had given up his crown for her; and the opening of the Boulder Dam.

He was noted not just for his careful elocution but also for his care with facts and for his fairness in handling clashing ideas.

In 1936, Mr. Trout was assigned to cover both the Republican and Democratic conventions. His tireless ability to hold an audience when nothing was happening amazed President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Mr. Trout was not limited to politics or news, and, during one period in the 1950s, served as host of a celebrity quiz show for CBS called "Who Said That?"

In the 1960s, Mr. Trout narrated several documentaries, both for CBS and for WCBS-TV, the CBS outlet in New York. Among them were programs on American funerals, gun ownership and suburban living. These were well received, and in 1964, as CBS News was trying to catch the ratings earned by Chet Huntley and David Brinkley on NBC, a decision was made to try to replay Walter Cronkite on some anchor assignments.

As a result, Mr. Trout was invited to co-anchor the CBS News coverage of the Democratic National Convention. He was joined by the CBS News correspondent Roger Mudd.

In 1965, Mr. Trout covered Winston Churchill's funeral and delivered a eulogy for Mr. Murro, who died that April. He decided to leave the daily television news program he did each evening for WCBS-TV and became a roving correspondent for CBS in Europe.

Robert Trout was born Robert Albert Blondheim on Oct. 15, 1909, in Washington, where his father owned a show store. He took Mr. Trout, the last name of a friend, as his professional name in 1932. - November, New York Times Service



A New Head

The Bangkok Post, Thailand's largest circulation English-language newspaper, announced it has appointed a Thai as its top executive for the first time in its 54-year history.

The board of directors of Post Publishing, the newspaper's parent company approved the appointment as managing director of Pornlert Lattanan, an executive with 15 years experience in the local financial industry.

Mr. Pornlert is currently a financial adviser to Bangkok's city government, the Post said.

The Post is Thailand's oldest operating English-language newspaper, with a daily circulation of 50,000-60,000, slightly ahead of its archrival, The Nation. Both newspapers also have comprehensive Web sites.

Pornlert previously worked with Thai Farmers Bank before presiding over SCF Finance and Securities, one of the 56 finance firms closed by the authorities in the wake of Thailand's 1997 financial crisis.

He then served as assistant secretary general of the state-run Financial Sector Restructuring Authority in 1998, the Post said. Mr. Pornlert takes over from Alister Smith, who joined the Post in 1998. Smith's retirement was effective January 1, and another director, John van der Linden, will oversee operations until Mr. Pornlert's appointment takes effect on February 1.

Chavalit Thanachanan, a former central bank governor who is also chairman of Bank of Asia, remains chairman of Post Publishing.



Media Madness... Again

Scotland, facing a tabloid invasion for Madonna's wedding, has not seen such media madness since strange footprints appeared on the shores of Loch Ness in 1933.

In the end, the 'Nessie prints' splashed across the front pages of Britain's Daily Mail turned out to be the dastardly hoax of a London tabloid journalist desperate for a monster scoop.

But before the hack and his hippopotamus foot umbrella stand were exposed as fakes, hordes of gullible journalists and scientists from across the globe had put the isolated, mountainous region firmly on the map.

A similar cloak of mystery hangs over the pop superstar's wedding in Skibo Castle, a fairytale fortress shrouded by dense woodland, perfect for shielding the rich and famous from the prying eyes and long lenses of the paparazzi.

Madonna and her British film director fiancé Guy Ritchie posted the marriage banns on the door of the local registry office in Dornoch, a picturesque seaside town five miles from the castle walls.

They flew in on Madonna's private jet. But further official details are as hard to come by as the elusive resident of Loch Ness, and locals, who have all put Christmas on hold, are hoping the love-struck duo don't pull out at the last minute.

Superstar couple Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones were also due to wed at Skibo, which the raven-haired Welsh beauty described as "the most romantic place in the world."

But an unwelcome leak to the press sent the couple packing off to New York's Plaza

Hotel in a huff, leaving egg on the facades of Dornoch's mediaeval hostels.

KEEP THE MEDIA-MEN HAPPY

If all goes well, the town of 2,000 people stands to net 1.5 million pounds from the 1,000-strong army of the world's media, which is expected to descend this week.

The Scottish Tourist Board is also cashing in on the surge of international interest in Highland weddings. Its website - www.highland-wedding.com - launched less than 24 hours after the "McDonna" news broke, has been flooded with requests, mainly from the U.S., for similar wedding packages.

"It's like winning the lottery," said Sandra Peterkin of the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board.

In an effort to keep the press sweet, the town is also planning a lavish entertainment package, including pipe bands, ceilidhs and a concert to showcase local talent.

But should Madonna and her Guy do a runner, blood could be spilt once more on the sandy shores of Dornoch Firth.

The last invasion force to arrive, a raping and pillaging mission more than 1,000 years ago under Thorfinn Ravenfinger, son of Viking chieftain Sigurd the Stout, didn't leave a building standing.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for Dornoch," said local hotelier Ailsa Stewart. "Let's just hope it all goes to plan."

EDINBURGH, Dec 19 (Reuters)



MISSING!

Six Days on an Emotional Roller coaster

Loss. It is always bad news. If an object holding sentimental value is misplaced it can be worse than losing a great deal of money. Losing your favourite teddy-bear can feel like the end of the world. The death of a parent is always terrible. It's all a matter of degree. But when a young child goes missing it is the greatest loss of all. And when it happens far away from your own loved ones it hits all the harder.

In May of this year it had been more than a decade since I had left England. I am an only child, both my father and stepfather had died and when I left I had been worried about leaving my mom on her own. But she knew my restlessness and encouraged me in my plans.

The travel bug had bitten long before, and after having done most of Europe and North Africa it was time to look for something really different. I had ended up in Thailand, a country that tourists were starting to add to their trail, but which still retains a lot of 'mystery' to this day. It was not long before I became enamored of the 'Land of Smiles' and its polite people, and decided to stay for a while.

After a few relationships with Thai misses I finally found a lady I believed to be the right one, and became the proud father of a beautiful daughter, Achinee Joyce (nicknamed Sara). But this year delight with my lot turned into despair. My five-year old baby girl had disappeared.

The apartment complex in central Bangkok where we live is like a little village all in itself. The residents are all friends and often eat together, gossiping about the day's happenings, which is the Thai way. Doors are always open. If a couple should have business outside the usual hours, there is always someone eager to take care of their son or daughter for a while.

My wife Boonhom works the night shift at a hospital, and I am a freelance journalist, so Achinee has become used to spending the odd night or two with her surrogate aunts or uncles.

On the first Monday in May (2000) I had been busy, and my daughter had spent the night with 'Uncle' Gordon, a retired US Navy gentleman with a young son, whose mother is also Thai. Gordon had a live-in maid cum-babysitter (Duan) who took care of his son Bobby, and Achinee was a regular guest. Three days previously Bia, a friend of Duan's, had turned up unannounced, and they were sharing a mattress together as she had nowhere else to stay. Bia was a young 17 year-old girl from the poor northeast of Thailand, who had never before been seen in the apartment.

The following day Gordon, with the rest of his household, took my daughter shopping, returning before midday. I bought my daughter her lunch in the early afternoon, after which she played games with her friends again. I was always close by, chatting with my friends in the apartment's coffee shop, and I stayed there until early evening. Achinee was not around then, but neither was Gordon or Bobby, so I assumed that they were enjoying themselves in Gordon's apartment, which was not unusual. I took the opportunity to go home and start writing up a few pieces on my computer. I later dropped off to sleep, secure in the belief that my daughter was staying over with Gordon for another night.

The next morning Khoi, my brother-in-law, arrived to take Achinee out for the day, and I went to Gordon's

to pick her up. Gordon looked surprised and told me that Achinee had not stayed with him, and that he had not seen her since the evening before.

Although I was not sure yet that anything amiss had occurred my heart began to race. I rushed around, knocking on doors looking for her, with panic mounting as I repeatedly received the reply: "No, Achinee is not here." Or, "No, she didn't stay with us last night".

After two hectic hours of accosting all we met and asking if anyone had seen Achinee, Khoi and myself were sharing an iced lemonade, debating what to do next. My wife then arrived on the scene, and frenziedly asked us if we had contacted the police yet. In our panic neither of us had thought of it. But I immediately raced upstairs to pick up a couple of photographs from the apartment, and ran out to catch a taxi to the local police station.

The following five days would have been a nightmare if I could have got any sleep. Which proved impossible. Initial feelings of panic gradually subsided into a kind of disbelieving numbness. How could it be that someone had taken away my beautiful daughter?

What did they want with her? Was she already out of Thailand, on her way to be sold into adoption, slave labour, or worse. I was fully aware of what can happen to missing children – especially little girls. The newspaper headlines of little children who had lost their lives kept trying to force themselves to the surface, no matter how hard I tried to stop them.

I did not know what to do next, I could not think straight. At one point, after about 72 hours without sleep, I blinked, to find myself surrounded by well-meaning friends. I had been standing in the middle of the car-park shouting out my daughter's name at the top of my voice. I felt devastated.

What could I do, was I never going to see Achinee again? Had she already been spirited away and sold to a childless couple? Or what? Or what? I had taken to pacing up and down between the apartment's exit and entrance like a bear in a cage. I traced and retraced my steps hundreds upon hundreds of times, always hoping to see Achinee pop her head around the corner.

Night turned into day once more, but as I had been sleeplessly walking around I had at last come up with a new strategy. I would print posters of my daughter and put them up around busy spots in the city asking for help in finding her. It seemed like a good idea, but all it did was to attract several sick calls.

The first was from a man claiming to be a ticket seller at the city's main bus depot. He rang the contact number he had seen on one of the posters and reported that he had seen a girl resembling my daughter boarding a bus bound for Chiang Rai. Chiang Rai is in the north of Thailand, in the centre of the area known as the Golden Triangle. I alerted the police who rushed a squad to the bus terminal to check out the report.

However, it was a busy holiday weekend, and they could not locate the bus before it had departed. The highway police stopped and searched it 30 kilometres outside Bangkok. But Achinee was not aboard, and it was later discovered that the man who had called in the report did not even work at the bus station, and that the contact telephone number he had given was false. The call had been a hoax. Subsequent calls from



Photos by Steve Sandford.

members of the public were treated with rather less haste by the police.

The next brainwave a British friend had was that I should make use of my media contacts. I phoned up a journalist from an English language daily I knew, who came along to see me, and the next morning Achinee's photo appeared on the front page, together with a story appealing for help.

Later the same day a man called to say he believed he had seen my daughter in the city two days before, with a young Thai girl. Other calls from members of the public came in, some genuine, some obviously not. But as we had received several offers of help after the story appeared in the English language newspaper I asked my wife to contact a Thai daily. By now it was clear that Achinee hadn't simply wandered off somewhere. Everyone realised she had been abducted, and I wanted it reported nationally. My wife agreed with me, and held out her hand for money. It appears that while a Thai newspaper will print such stories, they require payment. I was astounded, but I paid up.

By now all the residents of the apartment complex had become caught up in the drama, as they all knew and loved Achinee. My daughter is an outgoing, vivacious little girl, and has even appeared in advertisements on Thai TV. It was not until later in the afternoon of the third day that someone made the observation that Bia – the young girl who had been staying at Gordon's – had not been seen since the day Achinee disappeared either. And that from the description the man who had called earlier had given, it could well have been Bia that he had seen.

ROBIN W MARTIN is a freelance journalist based in Bangkok.



The police were informed, and the focus was switched to looking for Bia. Khoi went around Bangkok on a motorcycle with Duan (Gordon's maid), trying to locate her friend, as she was the only one who could readily identify her. Duan, I was horrified to learn from a resident of the apartment, had boasted that when living in England with a British boy-friend she had spent time in jail for wounding someone with a knife.

However, when confronted she insisted that she had had nothing to do with Achinee's disappearance, and that she wanted to do all that she could to help. But now she was looked upon with suspicion by everyone. Many of the things she had said to various people in the apartment seemed to contradict each other.

Already intense and overwrought I had to restrain myself from directing my anger at Duan. Gordon asked me to keep cool. He pointed out that there was no evidence (yet) to prove his maid's involvement, but that he would certainly keep a close eye on her from then on.

On Sunday morning we received a phone call from Bia to Duan that lifted my spirits from the depths of despair they had sunk to. She was in a province three hours to the east of Bangkok. She told us that

she had Achinee with her, and wanted to bring her home, but that she didn't have any money. My brother-in-law told her to wait in the local train station, and he would go to pick them up. He set out within five minutes, while my wife and myself stayed at the apartment in case any more phone calls came. A few minutes later, sure enough, another call came in and I rushed to grab the receiver.

I will never forget the way I felt when I heard my daughter's voice – one that I had started to believe I would never hear again – speaking to me for the first time in a week. She was able to tell me she was fine, but that she was hungry. Then the phone abruptly went dead as the money ran out.

My wife took over the next time it rang, and this time Bia was on the other end of the line. My wife tearfully begged her to take care of Achinee and to wait at the station until Khoi arrived to bring them home. We later discovered that Achinee had seen her photo on the front page of the Thai newspaper that morning, started crying, and said that she wanted to go home to mama and papa. Bia (and whoever else) apparently then panicked at the media and police attention.

Khoi's journey would take him about three hours, and at the expected time of his arrival there the phone rang. I picked it up to hear my brother-in-law on the other end of the line. He said he was in the train station, but that there was no sign of Achinee or Bia.

Crash! The feelings of hope that had filled me since the first phone call that morning suddenly drifted off into thin air. I silently resumed my mindless pacing, more lost than ever, my recent hopes having been so abruptly dashed. But the TV crews, journalists, and photographers that had descended upon the apartment when they heard an end to the drama might be in sight were due to be paid back for their time. They had spent the morning interviewing my family and other residents, and were soon to be rewarded for their patience.

Sometime after 4 in the evening I was jolted out of my gloomy reverie by a loud shout of "Robin!" I looked in the direction of the voice and saw my daughter standing on the corner with a friend, only 50 metres away. The next thing I knew I had scooped her up and was cuddling her, oblivious to everything but her liquid brown eyes gazing into mine. I slowly became aware that she was asking me why there were so many people around. And she was asking, "Why" (with a wonderful innocence), "are Mama and Auntie Noo crying?"

I make my living as a writer, but I could not answer her. I was lost for words. And the story has not ended yet. Bia has still not been found. She and 'a man' dropped Achinee off 100 metres from the apartment to walk in by herself. Then promptly disappeared, as has Duan.

Miraculously, though, my daughter had not suffered any harm. She had been the victim of an attempt by amateurs to break into the human trafficking trade. I am one of the lucky ones. I thank God, Buddha – whoever – that I have my daughter back. But there are many more less fortunate than me who will never see their little girl again, and I know how they must feel.



Statistic Speaks

In Southeast Asia the story is an all too common one. Trafficking of children for prostitution, slave labour, or adoption is a multi-million dollar industry. And it is getting worse year by year. Unicef estimate that in the region, more than one million children under the age of eighteen, enter the commercial sex trade every year. And some are as young as seven-years old.

Trafficking of women and children is rife in Southeast Asia due to a combination of many factors: poverty, gender discrimination, disintegration of traditional family and community values, lack of satisfactory education, armed conflicts, and corruption.

Unicef have discovered that the problem is particularly bad in the Mekong Sub-region, which consists of China's Yunnan province, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar (Burma), and Vietnam.

The police, UN agencies, and other organisations have joined forces to combat the problem. They report that children they have rescued from slave labour have been forced to work 18 hours a day, fed only once, packed ten to a small room, and are often beaten, raped, or otherwise abused. And of those who have escaped from brothels some have been found to have had an organ such as a kidney removed for subsequent sale on the black market.

UN agencies report that 30% to 35% of commercial sex workers in the Mekong Sub-region are under the age of 18. And that more than 50% have been sold, tricked, or lured into it by someone they knew. A disturbing trend is that younger and younger girls are being trafficked, in the mistaken belief that having sex with younger girls will reduce the risk of contracting AIDS/HIV.

Prostitution is known as the 'world's oldest profession', but a new spin has been put on it in Southeast Asia. A lucrative one as well. A 1995 study in Thailand estimated that the total revenue from prostitution was equal to between 50 and 60 % of the government's total budget for that year. And that is based on the conservative estimate of only 200,000 commercial sex workers.

The problem has become an epidemic. The developing countries of south and Southeast Asia are fighting to contain the problem, in tandem with agencies such as Unicef. But the help of the rest of the world is desperately needed if they are to make any headway in their struggle.



Historical Trip to Delhi, Jaipur and Agra

Dep Jan 24 night, Arr Bkk Jan 31, 2001
early morning by TG. Good opportunities don't come that often and take a break during Chinese New Year.

Day 1 : Jan 24 Departure from Bangkok at night by TG, arrive Delhi and check in for traditional welcome.

Day 2 : Jan 25 Visit points of interest in the capital covering Qutab Minar, Lotus temple, India Gate, Drive Past Presidential House, Parliament, Raj Ghat-cremation site of Mahatma Gandhi, Jama Masjid, the biggest muslim mosque in India, Red Fort.

Day 3 : Jan 26 Morning watch Republic Day Parade, a colorful and spectacular display of military might covering all armed forces, arsenal and cultural diversity in VIP enclosure. Afternoon by air conditioned coach to Jaipur also known as the Pink City and stay overnight

Day 4 : Jan 27 Visit famous Forts and Palaces, the state was the seat of Hindu Emperors during 1600AD stay overnight.

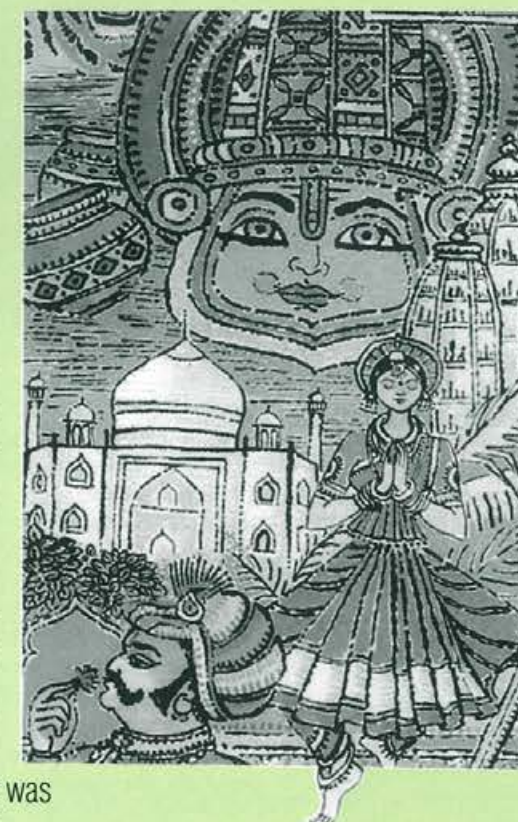
Day 5 : Jan 28 Leave for Agra, enroute visit Fatehpur Sikri built by Mughal Emperors. Afternoon city tour and visit Taj Mahal, one of world's wonders. Stay overnight.

Day 6 : Jan 29 Visit Agra's Red Fort leave for Delhi, en route visit Sikandra, where Fusion of Muslim and Hindu architecture exists. Arrive Delhi watch "Beating The Retreat" another spectacular exhibition of bugles and pipes in the presence of The President, Prime Minister, members of Diplomatic Community and us again in VIP enclosure. Stay overnight.

Day 7 : Jan 30 Morning meeting with Former PM I.K. Gujral and afternoon free for shopping or vice versa. Night take flight and arrive Bangkok 05:40 on Jan 31.

This trip will especially interest cultural buffs, historians, business community and shopping freaks (carpets, antiques, jewelry and books) to name a few.

Price : US\$ 850 for members and **US\$ 900** for non-members covers accommodation on twin sharing in four star hotels, air fare, transfers, tour and all meals. Only 30 seats have been allocated and it's on first come first serve basis.



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In A State of Limbo

George Orwell's dream has come true. Indonesia's sinister, propaganda-spewing Ministry of Information has disappeared down a "memory hole," and no longer exists.

On the sixth floor, grimacing, chain-smoking bureaucrats are now desperately seeking new jobs. Any one wants to hire ex-dictator Suharto's former Ministry of Information officials?

"I can work for the foreign media, or as a bus driver," Isa Anshary said in an interview in his file-strewn office.

One year ago, Anshary was the powerful Chief Sub-Directorate of Journalistic Accreditation, collecting applications from foreign correspondents, and arranging for the Information Ministry to issue the necessary press cards, special media passes and permits to restricted zones.

Reporters who were overseas, trying to get a journalist visa would phone or fax Anshary, pleading for his help to speed their application, because Indonesian embassies around the world often took weeks to clear the paperwork, which had to shuffle to and from Jakarta before a visa could be issued.

Reporters who sneaked in on a tourist visa were occasionally seized, detained, expelled and blacklisted. But now, there are no officials at the ministry to issue Indonesian press identification cards to the dozens of foreign correspondents in Jakarta.

The previously required, laminated press accreditation cards — bearing a journalist's photograph, name, media affiliation, signature and the card's validity date — have also vanished.

"Now I have no right to say I'm the chief sub-directorate of the department, or so and so," Anshary said, sitting at his lonesome desk in his formerly bustling office.

When President Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid abolished the Information Ministry nearly a year ago, Anshary and other worried official formed a self-declared Board for National Information and Communication, just to keep their jobs afloat while waiting to be reassigned — or fired. They've been waiting in limbo ever since.

"This kind of waiting is a sort of psychological torture," Anshary said, reaching for another cigarette.

"If Gus Dur doesn't want our board, maybe Gus Dur will give us an early pension and the problem is solved. But 10 months is too long, waiting and waiting.

"Will Gus Dur keep this board? It is not clear."

Anshary's adult life is entwined with the Information Ministry's devious labyrinthine of news, political manipulation and censorship. He has worked in the Information Ministry for the past 20 years. Anshary met his wife here, and she also still works at the ministry.

During her 11 years, she was assistant secretary to three ministers of information. Anshary, meanwhile, received a Master's degree from Iowa State University in 1988, in mass communication. In 1990, he worked on an Information Ministry "survey," in conjunction with the prestigious East-West Center in Hawaii.

Anshary, 47, claims his work is still vital to protect Indonesia's "unity" and project a proud image abroad. "If you meet an Indonesian in the United States, they will say 'No, I'm not Indonesian.' But if you meet an American, they are very proud to say, 'Yes, I'm an American.'"

"It seems there is a shyness to say, 'I'm Indonesian.' Maybe they consider Indonesia is a kind of poor country. Or this country is wrong, or is always against human rights."

"But he must not say he is not Indonesian. He must be proud. Even the American government sometimes did something wrong, but an American will still say, 'I'm proud.'"

The government, however, abolished the Information Ministry because after Suharto's brutal 32-year regime, many Indonesians demanded "reform" and a free society.

"But a government board can give the information for free," Anshary insisted.

"In some places, only 100 kilometers from Jakarta, there are 3,000 people who have only 30 television sets.

"I ask them, 'How do you get the information?' They say, 'We need to have a ministry official to come and make a clarification,'" Anshary added, explaining why his work should not be stopped.

The Ministry of Information, however, suffered a counter-attack by the enemies of doublespeak "I think it is a kind of revenge," Anshary said, his mood suddenly darkening.

"We were manipulated to serve one party. That might be the reason" that the ministry was trashed. Anshary was referring to the ministry's miserable reputation,

"He is one of the trouble-makers who said one day the Information Ministry will not be needed," Anshary explained.



A UNIFORMED IMAGE.
A guard at President Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid's palace in Jakarta helps project an image that the government likes the world to see



WHAT IS REALITY?
Independence day celebrations at President Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid's palace in Jakarta allow visitors to toss their trash wherever they like, presenting an image different from what was favored by the former Information Ministry.



X-ING OUT INDONESIA.
Immediately after President Suharto's downfall in 1998, pictures such as this one — by an Indonesian photographer — were publicly displayed in Jakarta for the first time without being censored by the Information Ministry.

FLAMES OF REVOLUTION.
A protestor waves an Indonesian flag in front of a burning bus minutes after a court in Jakarta declared an end to the corruption trial of former president Suharto — images and events that the axed Information Ministry would have been concerned about.

All photos: Copyright 2000 by Richard S. Ehrlich

under Suharto, of perverting democracy and bending Indonesians until they became obedient voters.

"The Ministry of Information has been manipulated to be a campaign worker for one party to win," he said, shaking his head with regret.

"We had 50,000 'information agents' in local areas, and remote areas. They were told, 'Your job now is to win (votes) for the party, and we don't care how you do it.'"

"No one can reject" such an order from their boss at the ministry, so information agents fanned out across Indonesia during election time, he said.

There're Always Other Ways

One European foreign correspondent said: "You may not know, but the officials there are to happy to give you a brand new Press card, on the spot, providing you put some Rupiahs in the fund box...I did that last time I was there and the Press card is still useful to get through some hassles..."

Meanwhile, some foreign correspondents obtain their journalist visas before arriving, while some travel on tourist visas. It is impossible to say what this will, or will not, get you into if chaos erupts.

"They had a public dialogue in rural areas, and would say, 'The government has established a new road, a new building, and in the election you have to vote for the same party in order to continue the development.'"

"That was very powerful. The information agent can influence people. They are very talented in how to change the peoples' minds. 'Any words from us, they had to pass to the people.'"

When President Wahid abolished the Information Ministry, he also axed the corruption-riddled Social Affairs Ministry. But Anshary blames the demise of the Information Ministry on the last minister of information, Mohammad Yunnus Yosfiah.

About a year ago, the minister surprised everyone by announcing that Indonesia no longer needed an Information Ministry, because he also agreed with the wave of democratic reform.

"He is one of the trouble-makers who said one day the Information Ministry will not be needed," Anshary explained.

"And shortly after, the ministry was dismissed. It was silly for him to talk like that." Leaning back in his chair, Anshary then slipped back into his role of helping others decide what should be reported, and added, "You can write that he is a trouble-maker."



RICHARD S. EHRLICH is a Bangkok-based special correspondent for *The Washington Times* and international media, and co-author of *Hello My Big Big Honey!* Love Letters to Bangkok Bar Girls and *Their Revealing Interviews*. His website is at <http://members.tripod.com/ehrllich/>

Newspaper Editor Takes on 'dark influences'



Outspoken newspaper editor Amnat Khunyosying survived the gunshot intended to take his life. Now he is fighting to keep justice alive.

Gunned down on a quiet suburban street on the afternoon of April 18, Amnat, 46, the owner and editor of Phak Nua Raiwan (Northern Daily) in Chiang Mai, nearly died when a bullet pierced his stomach as he twisted away from the shot.

Now he says local prosecutors are victimizing him for a second time by refusing to mount an effective case against the four soldiers – all non-commissioned officers in the Thai Army – arrested by police for the crime.

At an initial trial session on November 10 state prosecutors did not present a single witness. When queried by the judge, one prosecutor said he "forgot" to interview witnesses. Government prosecutors, according to Amnat, have yet to even interview him.

Despite Thailand's well-deserved reputation for having one of the freest presses in Asia, cases like Amnat's show that there can be a big difference between the treatment of journalists in Bangkok and in other areas. Journalists say bribes, political pressure and occasional violence remain a fact of life in provincial areas.

"The prosecutors don't want to do anything," Amnat said. "They are afraid or bought off by the local political bosses." As a result, Amnat added, it has fallen to him to interview witnesses and hire private counsel to represent his interests in the prosecution. The trial is scheduled to resume later this month, and Amnat says he will be ready at that time to present his own witnesses.

That has been difficult. Twenty local lawyers refused to take the case, according to Amnat, because of local pressure. Some eyewitnesses able to identify the accused have fled or refused to come forward. One woman described the scene of the attempted murder

and said she saw the assailants kicking Amnat after he was shot. The woman's family has urged her not to speak out in court because they fear retaliation.

During the November 10 hearing, Amnat dodged a legal bullet when he pleaded with the court not to release the accused on bail. Lawyers for the defendants told the court that their clients deserved to be reunited with their families and their army units in the absence of any

witnesses to testify against them. Amnat countered that the accused posed a risk to his life if they were released from jail.

The judge continued the case but ordered Amnat to come to court with his own lawyers and witnesses or the soldiers would go free.

Fortunately, prominent Thai human rights lawyer Senator Thongbai Thongpao agreed to take the case. A frequent defender of the rights of journalists and others, Thongbai said: "In this case, there are many dark influences. It is very difficult to get a fair trial here in Chiang Mai."

Thongbai wants the court to move the case several hundred miles south to Bangkok, but Amnat says he would be unable to afford the expense of bringing witnesses to the capital.

The fight will be a difficult one. Indeed, prosecutors nearly failed even to bring charges against the men, despite the fact that Amnat himself identified them to police as his attackers while other witnesses gave statements linking the men to the crime.

In mid July, as a legal deadline loomed for filing formal charges after the men were arrested, Amnat organized a group of about 20 television and newspaper reporters to go to the prosecutor's office to question him about the case. With cameras rolling, the journalists asked the prosecutor why he was refusing to accept police recommendations to charge the accused in court. Finally, at the eleventh hour, the prosecutor relented and signed the charges, canceling bail and scheduling the case for trial.

A popular tourist destination, Chiang Mai is also close to the Golden Triangle drug trade and Thailand's notorious border with Burma. It has long been a magnet for organized crime, illegal logging syndicates and other rackets.

A harsh critic of Chiang Mai political bosses, which he describes as the "mafia", Amnat has frequently used

his newspaper to investigate local corruption and name names.

In the months before the shooting, his small independent paper aggressively covered a scandal involving a local politician accused of accepting bribes from a Chinese criminal seeking refuge in Thailand. Having received an escalating number of death threats before the shooting, Amnat knew that he might be attacked. He also says he knows who ordered the killing – the same politician his newspaper accused of accepting bribes, he says – but cannot prove the allegation unless the case against those who carried out the shooting goes forward.

"The key to this is convicting the soldiers, then they can lead us to the mastermind," said Amnat.

Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, Phak Nua Raiwan is still printed on a battered 1960s vintage offset press. It is laid out by hand, the small staff share three first-generation Macintosh computers and advertisers have become scarce as a result of the paper's controversial reputation.

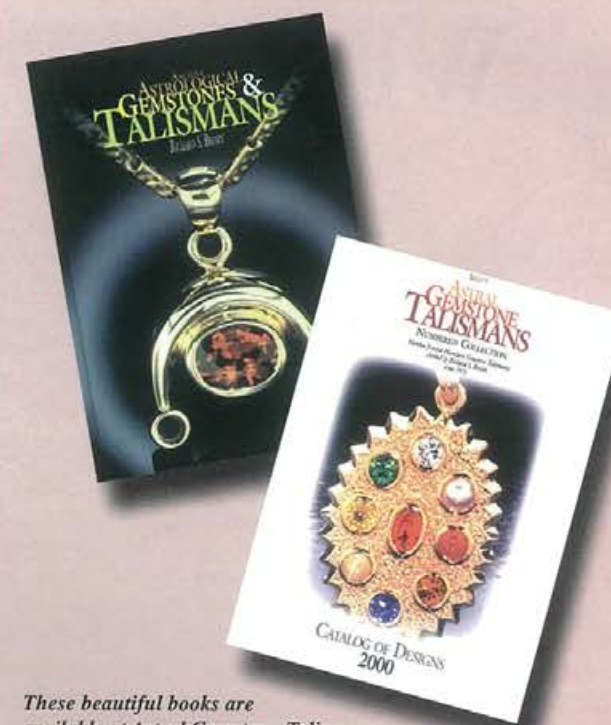
"He is really trying to change the way things are done around here," said a prominent local restaurateur who advertises in the paper and has donated funds to help Amnat. "We need people like him."

A Western diplomat who has followed the case closely said he has little doubt that political pressure is being brought to bear on the case. The diplomat said that local military commanders had privately confirmed the soldiers' guilt and willingly remanded them for trial. "Still," the diplomat said, "I worry about Amnat. He is at great risk in all of this."

Amnat has continued to receive death threats, as have members of his staff. His wife has urged her husband to flee Thailand for Australia. Western embassies have said they are willing to help him relocate out of the country.

But he has no intention of leaving.

"All I want to do is publish my newspaper," he said. "And stop this mafia from operating so freely."



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LIN NEUMANN is an adviser to the Southeast Asian Press Alliance and consultant for the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Why I Left the SCMP

On Monday (Nov 6, 2000), I resigned from Hong Kong's South China Morning Post, a newspaper I have served as China editor for 10 years. I did so with a deep feeling of bitterness, but the pressures that forced me to this decision did not come as any surprise.

I have had a somewhat checkered relationship with Chinese authorities ever since I was stationed in Beijing as a correspondent for Asiaweek in mid-1986. Beijing's censors and press officials are particularly harsh on ethnic-Chinese newsmen, who they think should display a certain degree of patriotism.

Since Hong Kong's handover to Chinese sovereignty, Beijing's top leaders have taken an avid interest in the China coverage of the Hong Kong press, and sought to influence the Chinese-language press. Similar pressure is now being exerted on the English-language press, including the South China Morning Post.

Beijing's obsession with the Hong Kong media has reached alarming proportions. According to a Beijing source, before President Jiang Zemin's infamous tirade last month against the "simple, sometimes naive" SAR press corps, a senior cadre called a meeting of officials from units including the Chinese Communist Party Publicity Department, the Ministry of State Security, the Police, the Customs Authority and the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office. The officials reportedly considered having the CCPD and Customs issue new directives making it more difficult for certain Hong Kong papers and Web sites to get into the mainland.

Such measures, however, wouldn't tackle the root of the problem. Much more effective would be media owners themselves doing the cleaning up. Many important TV stations and newspapers in the SAR are owned by tycoons with good links to the leadership – and extensive business interests in the mainland. Given a few hints, the tycoons are smart enough to deliver the goods – a post-1997 Hong Kong phenomenon called "anticipating the wishes of the bigwigs from up north."

Beijing's effort to influence the SAR media is also facilitated by the lack of a well-established church-and-state boundary between the owners and management on the one hand, and the newsroom on the other.

The blurred line is often exacerbated in Chinese family-run outfits; in many instances, the owners appoint relatives and cronies to senior positions in management – and sometimes even to the editorial department.

When Kerry Group Chairman Robert Kuok bought a controlling stake in the SCMP from Rupert Murdoch in 1993, there was speculation that with his close ties to the Chinese leadership he might try to inject a dose of patriotism into the paper and get rid of or sideline "trouble-making" journalists. Alleged attempts by Mr. Kuok and his management staff to tamper with the newsroom – including efforts to fire certain journalists – were documented in the book "Dealing with the Dragon" by Johnathan Fenby, editor from 1995-99.

According to Mr. Fenby and others, Mr. Kuok moved fast to edge me out. When the SCMP and the Sunday Morning Post merged in 1995, my name appeared on a list of 20-odd journalists to be made re-

dundant. My job was apparently saved because of Mr. Fenby's protests. After that, the owners and management began to scrutinize my weekly columns, and complaints were often made to the editor about my alleged transgressions.

Nothing too dramatic happened, however, until June of this year, when Mr. Kuok wrote a letter to the editor excoriating a column I wrote on the trip of 30 tycoons to Beijing. Given the fact that Mr. Kuok was one of the tycoons, most of the Post news and political staff played the story in a low-key manner. The main point – that Beijing wanted the tycoons to rally behind Hong Kong's Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa – already been made by the top cadres themselves in on-the-record remarks. Numerous other SAR and foreign commentators had drawn the same conclusion.

Meanwhile, because Beijing suspected that certain journalists were behind a "dump-Tung conspiracy," official attitudes towards the Hong Kong media hardened. This was perhaps indirectly reflected in a number of conversations that Mr. Fenby's successor, Robert Keatley, had with me. Both before but particularly after the Kuok missive, Mr. Keatley told me I should "diversify" China coverage. He asked me to write – and to run – less stories about sensitive issues including intrigues within the Communist party, personnel changes or political campaigns such as that related to Mr. Jiang's "The Theory of the Three Representations." These conversations left me with the impression Mr. Keatley was trying in a subtle way to depoliticize the coverage.

To give one example, last spring most China journalists in Hong Kong – as well as foreign correspondents in Beijing – began reporting on leadership arrangements and intrigues leading up to the 16th Party Congress in 2002. This was one of the hot topics of the year. Mr. Keatley, however, repeatedly told me it was "too early" to write about such things. When I came up with a scoop in mid-year about Jiang having decided to step down as party chief in 2002, Mr. Keatley at first did not want to put it on the front page. The piece was later picked up by major newswires.

In September, Mr. Keatley wrote me this memo: "I get the picture from your columns of Jiang and others spending all their time squabbling among themselves about jobs for the boys and protecting their buddies, while no one pays any attention to what is happening to China or what policies should be adopted." I told him he had mis-

read the columns, which had dwelled in detail on, among other things, new reform measures, the development of western China, and foreign policy.

At about the same time, Mr. Keatley made an apparent attempt to tone down a story I wrote about personnel-related discussions at the Beidaihe leadership conference in August. Without consulting me, he inserted one sentence into the text saying the facts in my story "could not be confirmed."

Things came to a head after a column I wrote last month on Mr. Jiang's frenetic reactions to the fall of the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia. Mr. Keatley told me that the column had run afoul of some people. As

No Censorship at the SCMP

Willy Wo-lap Lam's account of his resignation from the South China Morning Post is an inaccurate, self-serving description of the unfortunate event.

The SCMP is in the process of expanding its news and feature coverage of China, including more staff members and more space. NO one, including Willy Lam, has ever had responsibility for overall direction of our China news coverage and we decided that his special talents are not especially suited to this expanded task. So we gave responsibility, which Willy had exercised partially and somewhat nominally, to someone else.

However, I spent considerable time trying to persuade him to remain as an associate editor, columnist and contributor. He declined and I learned that he intended to leave the SCMP early next year in any case and had been talking to potential employers for several months.

Although I emphasized many times that I could not possibly tell him what to think about Chinese politics, or what conclusions his columns should reach, I did say frequently that I felt the quality of his journalism would improve with some editing. For example, I do not believe using the otherwise unamplified phrase "a source said" amounts to confirmation of any fact or opinion, nor is it helpful to readers – something I was taught many years ago as a young Wall Street Journal reporter.

It is obvious that this whole matter could and should have been handled with more skill and understanding, and I regret the disquiet which has resulted.

Finally, Mr. Lam referred to the man who will assume news management responsibilities at the SCMP as a former reporter for the state-owned China Daily, which was true in 1991. Since then Wang Xiang-wei has worked in London, earned a graduate degree from the London School of Economics and spent the past seven years in Hong Kong with two English-language newspapers – the now-defunct Eastern Express and since 1996 the SCMP, where he has had both reporting and managing duties. He is a fine journalist who will bring high standards to his new assignment.

Robert Keatley,
Editor, South China Morning Post

This reply was published in the Nov 17th issue of the Asian Wall Street Journal, Editorial Page

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usual, he refused to say who these people were. He told me that from that point onward, he had to read my columns first – and do the requisite pre-editing – before they went to the editor of the op-ed pages, where my columns appear. I protested. I told Mr. Keatley if he was not prepared to prescreen all the articles written by staff members and contributors – but that he was only prescreening mine – it would amount to discrimination and intimidation against myself.

No other editors of the Post had tried to prescreen my columns before. And in the SCMP system, editors of different sections have the autonomy to process stories without having first to submit them to the editor. In fact, it was in September last year that Mr. Keatley first made the request that he pre-screen my columns. He backed down after I protested vigorously. This time, however, he told me he would go ahead no matter what I thought.

The coup de grace came last Thursday, when Mr. Keatley told me they had appointed Wang Xiangwei, a former journalist at the state-owned China Daily, to be my replacement as China editor. My responsibilities over newsgathering – which accounted for more than 80% of the time I spent at the Post – were taken away from me.


Though I had been the Post's main China news person the past 10 years, I had not been consulted on the so-called reorganization, which colleagues are afraid might result in a toning down of China coverage. I quit in protest, both at the way I was treated and the evident lack of resolve at the SCMP to stand up to China's pressure and continue reporting on topics that Beijing deems sensitive.

Willy Wo-lap Lam

This letter was published in the November 10th issue of the Asian Wall Street Journal, Editorial Page




WILLY WO-LAP LAM has covered China since the late 1970s. He is now working with CNN.com, the internet arm of CNN.




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Out In The Woods

Photos by Peter Charlesworth, a freelance photographer based in Thailand

A group of journo's and friends recently sponsored a holiday weekend in Rayong for 42 girls and one teenage boy from the Human Development Center.

The girls ranging in ages 7 to 18 all live at various foundation homes under the care of Father Joe Maier. Most of the girls come from homes that were of risk to their health or being, and Father Joe and his team provide these children with long-term shelter in a safe environment.



Photographer Peter Charlesworth, his wife Tic and two sons - Jamie and Thomas, graciously opened up their home in Rayong, turning their garden into a weekend camping and adventure playground.

The garden has everything a kid, (and young at heart adult) would ever want - a tree house built to military specifications, a flying fox, and various birds and animals - to keep everyone entertained.

For many of the journo's, the activities on the first day presented a great challenge! On the bus by 0700 hours, and expected to be bright and cheery, sing a few songs, a boat trip to Koh Samet, and in the water by 0830. Most of us are rarely awake at that unearthly hour on a Saturday morning, let alone trying to supervise beach activities, and more than 40 high-energy children.

Of course that old favorite banana boat ride was in high demand, as was splashing, swimming, and just mucking around. It appeared that the night before, the girls had hatched a scheme to try to tire out the adults. And with little effort they achieved their goal.

When our skin turned red, it signaled the time to return to our weekend retreat. So it was back on the boat and on the bus to base camp. It soon became apparent who had the stamina and who didn't. The girls did and the journo's didn't. Later that afternoon many journo's were found in various horizontal positions around the house and garden.

The girls made full use of the adventure playground; on the tree house and the flying fox. After dinner it was time to sing and dance around the bon fire, and very soon, exhaustion sent most of the adults early to bed - None of that usual weekend boozing.

Sunday morning, we walked up into the nearby jungle for a swim at the waterfalls, and its back for lunch before boarding the bus for the journey back to Bangkok.



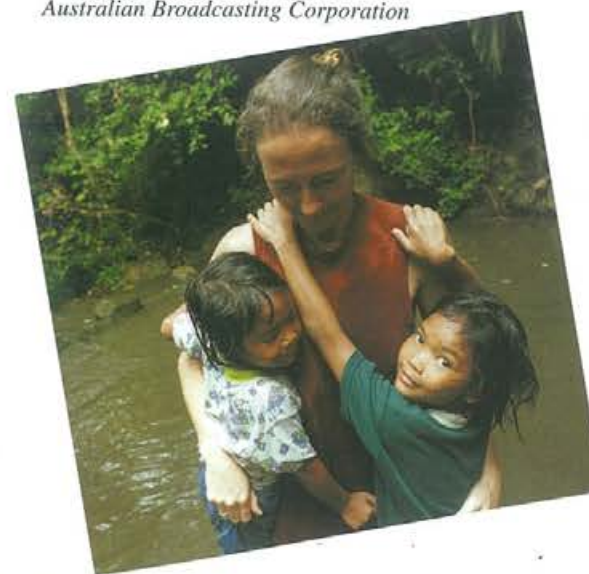
Many journalists have done stories over the years featuring Father Joe and his kids, so we saw it as a time for us to give something back, and the weekend was a fun and delightful way of doing it.

Our thanks to the Royal Thai Army for providing a bus and drivers, as well as to the Charlesworth family for providing an open house and garden, and for all those who donated money and time, and making the camping weekend happen.

For those of us who went on the weekend, we'd like to especially thank the girls, and the staff from the Foundation for a great weekend. We hope to do it again!

The foundation is always in need of financial assistance and has an Educational scholarship fund. For further information, please call Khun Ratana or Tim Hague at: 392 1821 or 381 1821.

Kate Gunn,
Australian Broadcasting Corporation



Wat a Lark! Wat to Do?



In its second Cambodia trip of 2000, the FCCT this time went north to Siem Reap on Oct 21-23, following its notorious excursion to the south coast by steam train. THAI Airways International sponsored flights to the second Khmer international airport. Some of us, of course, hadn't pre-ordered visas nor brought photos for visas on arrival. Still, one look at our 'trust us we're journalists' faces and we were through immigration quicker than you can say "I've got Khieu Kannaridh on my phone."

Digs this time were in the Sofitel Royal Angkor, a five-star resort so new (one week) that the lake hadn't yet been filled with fish? one of the few items not trucked in from Thailand by the Thai owner, Supachai Verapuchong. He could have built a hotel in Thailand for the cost of getting 700 truckloads through two border vehicle changes and the tortuous road from Poipet. It was worth his perseverance; the rooms and buffet meals were magnificent, and the pool rivals the Tonle Sap in size and amorphous shape.

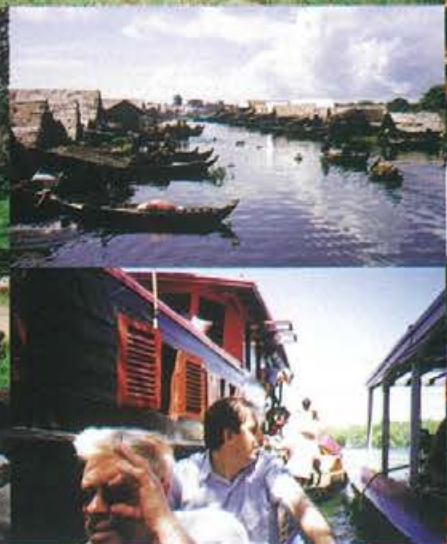
We understood how the cargo felt while juddering out to the deceptively close Roluos group of temples on the first afternoon. This was the first of several changes of schedule wrought by the floods.

The road to our star destination – the jungle-infested Ben Melea – was impassable even to 4WDs. We were in mini-buses with no suspension, which rather shook up some female members of the party, who didn't regard the bouncy back seat as a place for joyous songs of camaraderie.

Among the earliest of Khmer capitals, the Roluos



Photos by Phil Cornwell-Smith



ruins were made so much more evocative through the explanations of Christophe Pottier from the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient (EFEO). Armed with a new fact for every step, we spiraled up the temple mountain of the Bakheng for a fabulous panorama, in which Angkor Wat could be made out in the golden 4 pm light.

Just as some of us were muttering sagely about dodgy restoration of sculpture niches at Preah Ko, Christophe put us right that the varicoloured stucco was actually original. Mind you, we didn't need an expert to see how chips in the facial masonry at Lolei were from wartime shooting practice. We also had the benefit of being joined by Roland Neveu, photojournalist publisher of the most detailed and pirated guidebook and map to Angkor.

Day two was a trial by vibration as we spent the entire day bussing to Phnom Kulen and back via the enchanting Banteay Srei temple. Kulen is the latest Angkor day trip to open up, though under the 'no-questions-asked' ambit of a local general who charges a generous entry fee (generous to him, that is). Before the heavens opened we managed to explore the C15th reclining Buddha carved out of a hilltop outcrop and some of the many forest shrines.

Eschewing BBQ monkey from the many stalls (powered for medicines, apparently), we had a Sofitel picnic at salas by the raging waterfall. Sadly the same water was running too deep over the 'thousand lingams' carved into the stone riverbed that sanctify the water supply for Angkor. Problem was, we had to cross it via a semi-collapsed footbridge, our second of the day after a hole in a road bridge meant we had to disembark and pay a fee to the villagers who helped our bus over. Hmm... I bet after we left they replaced the missing plank until the next dupe rolled up – which was probably us on the return trip!

While the Kulen 'franchise' is nasty piece of feudalism, the restoration of Angkor's temples more mildly evokes the imperial scramble for colonies. On balance it's a good thing, but it's like each donor country competes to see who's got the biggest, best proportioned prang.

While everyone's assured they won't mess up the most (who could surpass India dissolving Angkor Wat's friezes with acid?), the mother of all bas reliefs is – quelle



surprise – the former imperial overlord. Actually they were very nice and EFEO architect Pascal Royere gave the FCCT an exclusive glimpse of their biggest project, the Baphuon. Imagine disassembling Wat Arun, only for the records of what went where to get destroyed and, hey, you have a reason it's taken decades to reassemble the palace temple mount. 2004 is the date they'll complete what they can, given that the reclining Buddha at rear has been made of countless key stones.

Hardly a day goes by when there isn't some temple or archaeological find in Cambodia, and these Indiana Jones types have been cataloguing the remnants for the best part of a century, minus a wartime hiatus. Being able to draw on such expertise is one thing that sets FCCT trips apart from others, generally more expensive academic trips from Bangkok. That, and a habit of bumping into people we write about.

Straight away, we encountered the clan of Amnuay Virawan, head of the Chavali's economic dream team during the crash. First night, our gala dinner at the Sofitel had our old friends Minister of Information Khieu Kannaridh and Tourism Secretary Thong Khon as guests of honour. Next day, speaker of the Cambodian parliament and former PR, Prince Norodom Rannaridh, popped in for a bubbly lunchtime chat, as he's wont to do.

But hob-nobbing with the famous is a busman's holiday for hacks, so the extra free day (because of a delayed flight and a very generous Sofitel) was a chance to get away. Some of us pootered off into the Tonle Sap board the boat of Laurent Holdener who runs tours on it for Terre Cambodge. But no sooner had we passed the floating Vietnamese and Khmer villages near Phnom Krom than a helicopter swooped by. Steering warily between barely visible submerged trees, our captain said it was Prime Minister Hun Sen, sorting out a dispute over lake ownership (it's determined by the inundated ground five metres below).

No escape from celebrity in the famous flooded forest, either. Citing some very impressive eco-rules, Laurent apprehended an unlicensed boat entering the protected reserve. Since it has been chartered by, ahem... the British ambassador, we offered the wayward dip and his family a lift in our canoes through the treetops. No sign of the promised monkeys, but an eagle made a dramatic swoop to pluck a fish from the teeming waters. On our way out from the forest's charming stilt village, who did we encounter but the warlord 'franchisee' of Phnom Kulen. Day off? Hardly, we were plying the waters of pure power!

PHILIP CORNWELL-SMITH is the managing director of Bangkok Metro Magazine.



"PEB YOG IB HAIV HMOOB – WE ARE HMONG"



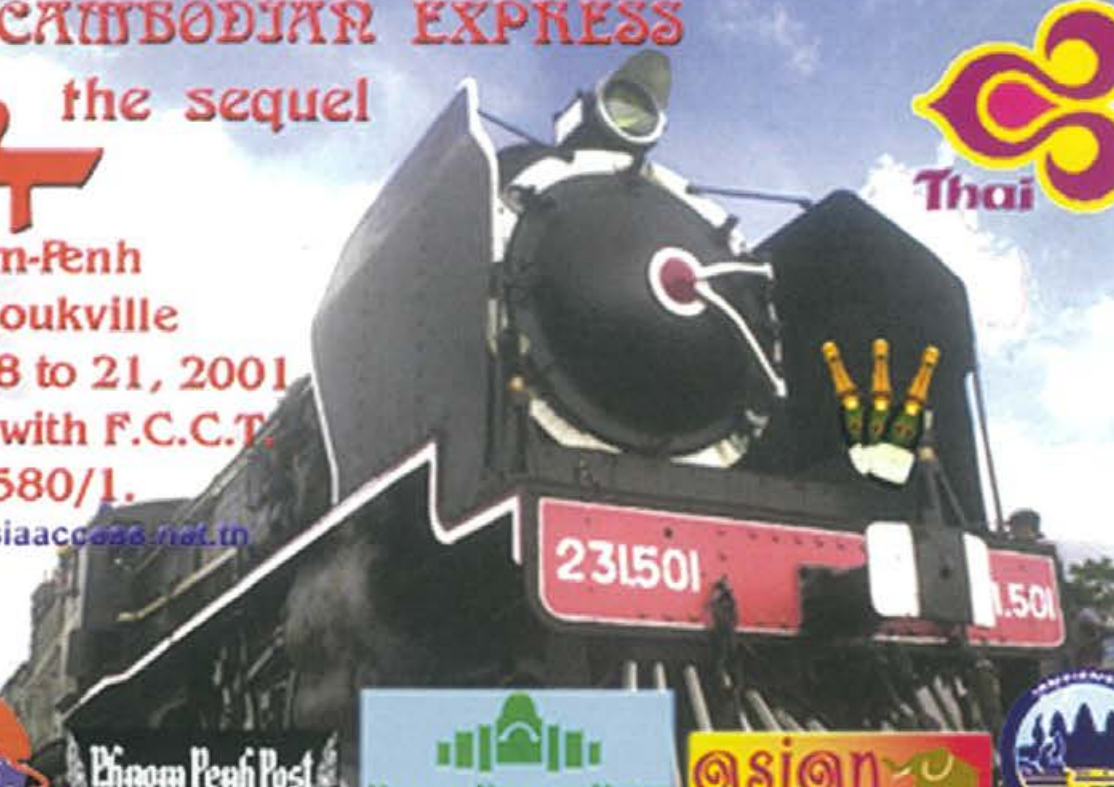
"Cultures never hold still: they are alive, constantly evolving, adapting, being borrowed, forced upon one another. They are like moving pictures on a screen"

We saw a strong sense of identity and dignity preserving the culture of the Hmong people in North Vietnam. A selection of photographs taken there will be exhibited at the F.C.C.T in February. Opening night is on Friday 2nd of February.

Photographs by Tim and Sophie Loft.



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The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand is organizing, in co-operation with THAI AIRWAYS INTERNATIONAL a very special voyage to Cambodia from the 18th until the 21st of January 2001.

Following the success of the first train trip from Phnom-Penh to Kampot featuring a 1934 PACIFIC 231 steam-engine and His Majesty KING NORODOM SIHANOUK own carriages, with on board some 60 Correspondents, Diplomats and Businessmen, the Club has decided to reiterate the event, extending the rail trip to Sihanoukville, a fantastic beach destination which deserves to be known internationally thanks to its unspoilt beaches, quiet surroundings and fantastic seafood.

Passengers will depart Bangkok Don Muang Airport on January 18th aboard TG 696 to be greeted at Pochentong Airport by the Ministers of Information and Tourism of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

The group will then proceed to Phnom-Penh Railway Station to board the special train with the PACIFIC 231 steaming through the countryside towards Kampot. A restaurant car will be added to the train with a buffet (prepared by the Chefs of the Royal Phnom-Penh Hotel) for all the guests and hopefully champagne courtesy of the House of Laurent Perrier.

The train should reach Kampot by 5pm (maximum speed being 40Km per hour). After setting up at the Hotel, ASIAN TRAILS buses will take everybody to KHEP for the sunset and a Banquet on the terraces of the King's Residence overlooking the sea.

The next morning will see everybody on the train again for the beautiful scenic ride to Sihanoukville, where a newly built hotel will be taken over by the group for a gourmet night of fun and rest.

Sun, sea and seafood with boat trips to near-by islands will take most of Saturday the 20th until the time to board the ASIAN TRAILS coaches back to Phnom-Penh via an excellent road and great mountain scenery.

The ROYAL PHNOM-PENH Hotel will host everybody for the night and a Gala Dinner will be held in its garden with a Khmer Circus show, courtesy of Princess BUPPHA DEVI, Minister of Culture.

On Sunday the 21st, those who do not know Phnom-Penh will be able to visit the City and its highlights or go shopping for silk or silverware. Others will be invited to a cruise down the Mekong on board the "Deauville 2". Departure to Bangkok will be with TG 699 at 17.15.

For those willing to discover more of Cambodia, the F.C.C.T. will organize a three days extension to Rattanakiri with Phnom-Penh Airways, staying in a beautiful mountain inn by the lake with visits to the local tribes and even a volcano. Warm pullovers will be recommended for this extension as it is the cold season in the Kingdom.

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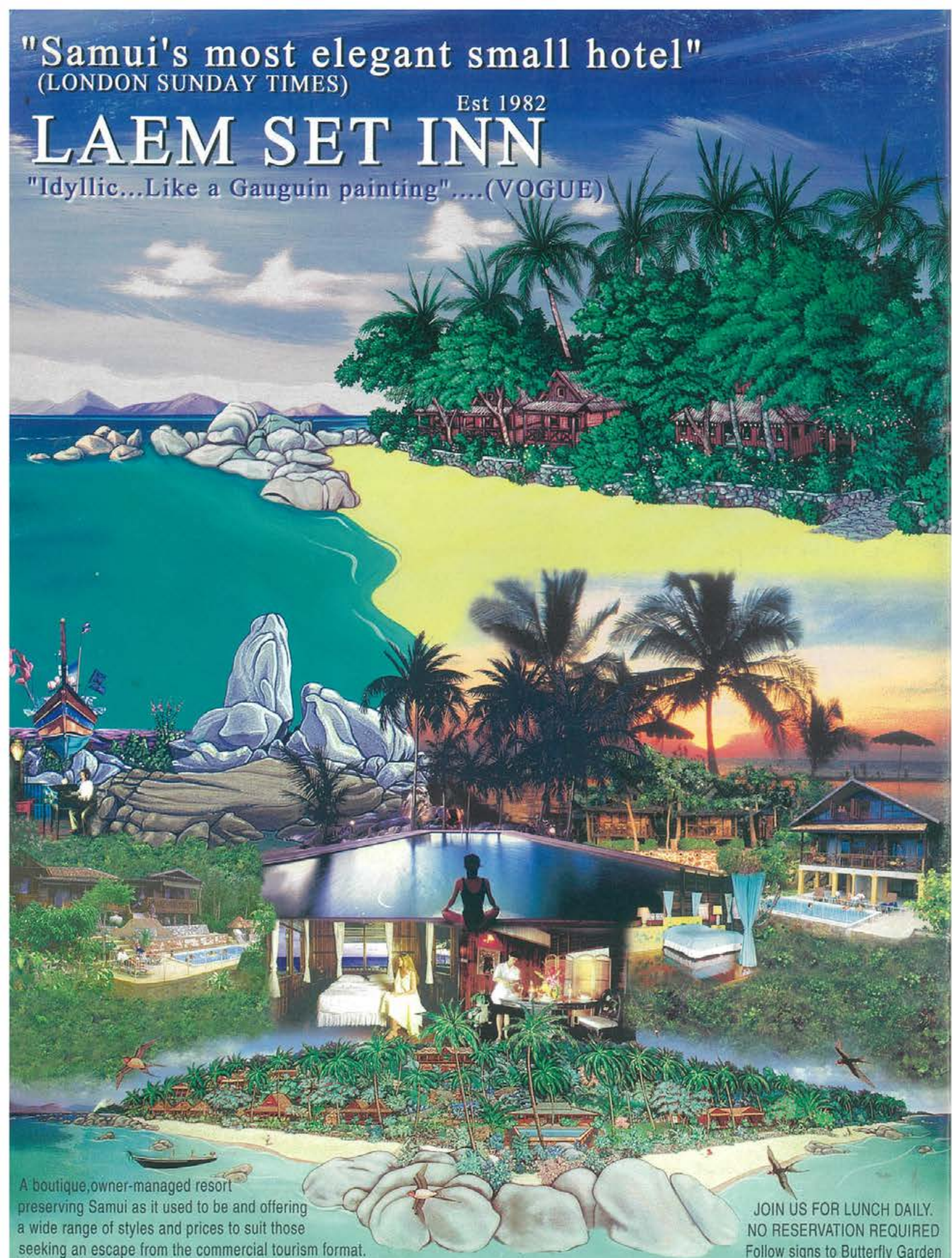
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