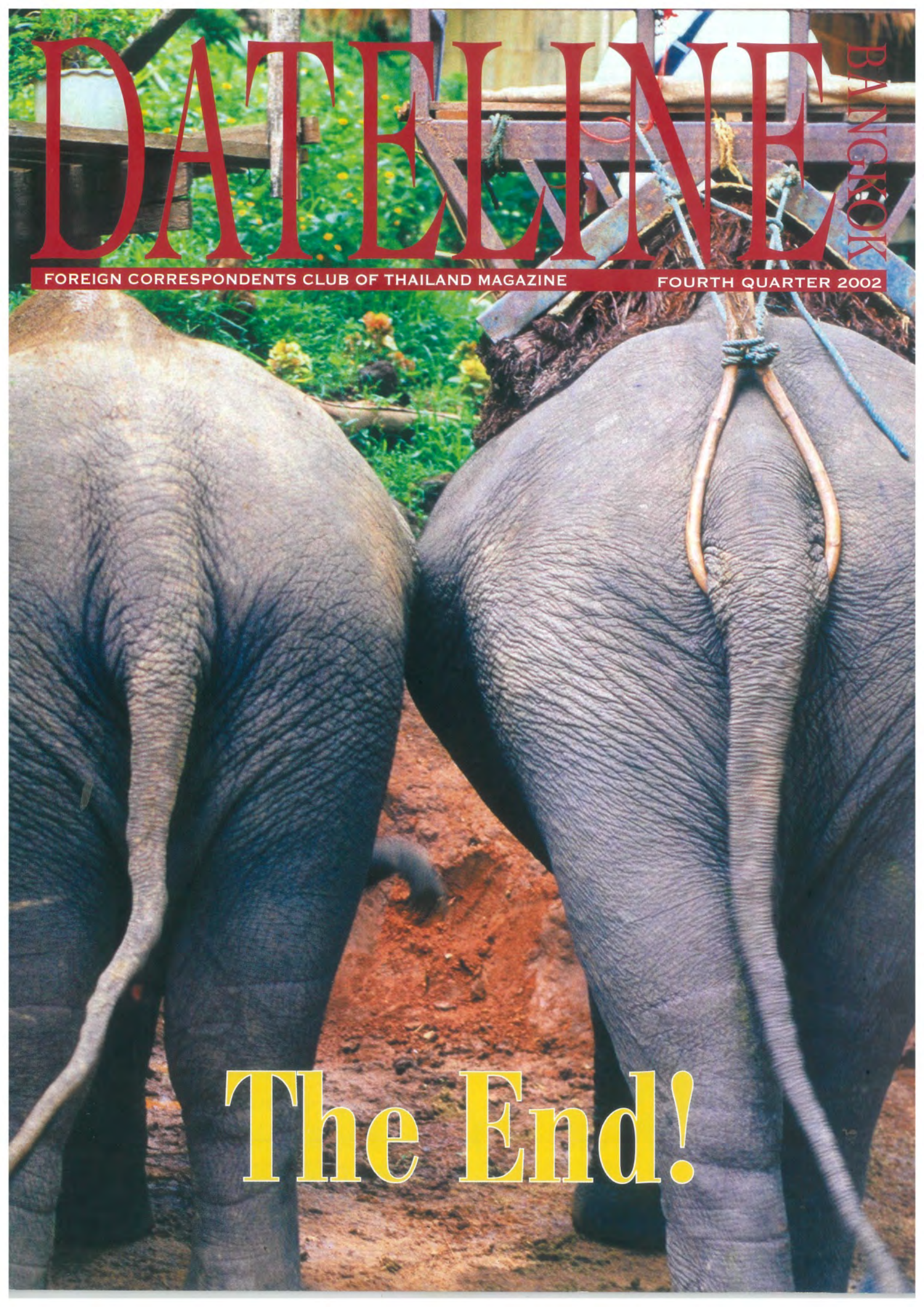


DATELINE

The background of the magazine cover is a photograph of two elephants standing side-by-side on a dirt path. The elephant on the right is facing the camera, with its trunk hanging down. It has a wooden harness with ropes attached to its head. The elephant on the left is seen from the side, with its trunk also hanging down. In the background, there is green foliage and a wooden structure.

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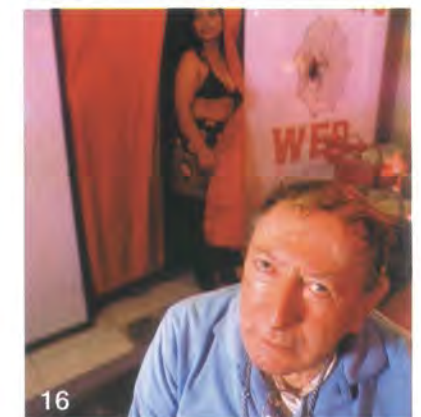
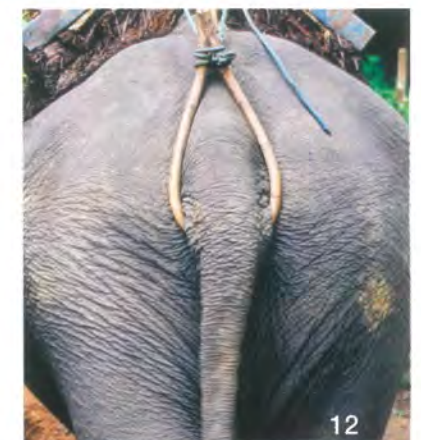
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Join Us

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 breaking news panel discussions with the leaders of government, private sector and non-governmental organizations. Each month the club exhibits work from a different photographer or artist, and the last Friday of each month 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 Mick Elmore before doing too much work. Submissions are paid for with glory and bar coupons.



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More Value for Members

Maybe it's the approach of the festive season. It could be the onset of the best weather of the year. But a tinge of the feel-good factor makes me want to take stock of the benefits associated with being a member of the FCCT.

Some of these are often overlooked. For instance, the number of other press clubs worldwide with which we are affiliated, and at which a flash of the FCCT membership card will gain you temporary use of their facilities. Take a look at pages 137-138 of your FCCT directory. There you find a list of the affiliated clubs.

Perhaps the handiest overseas club for most members is Hongkong's FCC. The club, and ours, is one of the few in the region with its own premises. That means your FCCT card will allow you to buy chits for food and drink there, as well as listening to live music in the evening and using the club's other facilities. And as anyone who has been to Hongkong recently knows, while FCC prices may seem steep by Bangkok standards, just try to dine out at hotels or other reasonable restaurants and bars in the

territory. It'll cost you an arm and a leg.

The same goes for Japan's FCC, in central Tokyo, and a range of other clubs further afield. Show your card at press clubs from Washington and New York to a number in Europe and even Brazil and enjoy. Remember that as an FCCT member you belong to the oldest, largest foreign press club in Southeast Asia. And you should be proud of it. The clubhouse may look a bit shabby, and the atmosphere is hardly renowned for its decorum. But for a number of us, that's part of the attraction. Don't forget that as an FCCT member you are part of a worldwide network of clubs.

There are other external benefits from your membership. These are listed in the bulletin sent to you each week, but some of you may not have noticed. You can get a 20% discount on food at both lunch and dinner at many restaurants at the Shangri-La Hotel. Ditto for all catering outlets at the Rembrandt Hotel. You can also sign up for Asia Books, membership promotion. Our hardworking part-time Marketing Manager Brigid is responsible for all this. There will be more coming.

Brigid has also been working hard gathering gifts for the lottery at our Christmas Party which, like last year, will be at the Marriott Riverside Hotel on the evening of Saturday, December 14. This year's lottery promises to be richer than ever, with more free airline tickets and other goodies. The only complaint I heard about last year's event was that the river ferry ride after the party made the member feel drunk. Hmm.

But materialistic thing aside, let's start feeling positive about belonging to a club of note. While we may not be too selective in allowing in new members, we have a history to be proud of as a bastion of free-thinking and a channel for keeping abreast of local, regional and world events. We don't have a swimming pool, fitness centre or tennis courts. But we have ourselves, a name known almost everywhere in Bangkok and a lot outside Thailand also.

Have a great Christmas, and here's to a good New Year.

Rodney Tasker

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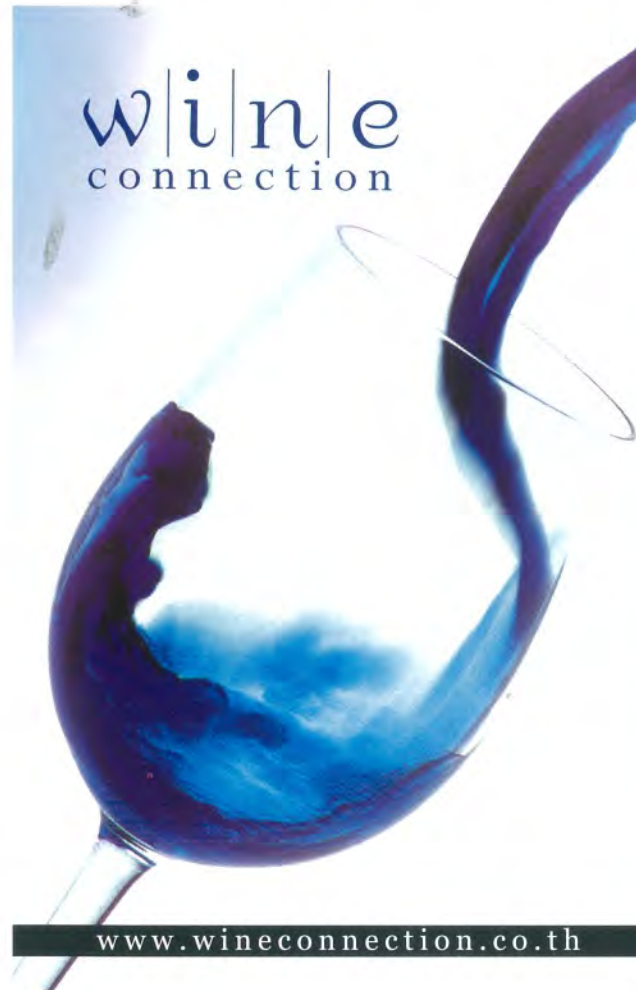
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Those Were the Nights



His Royal Highness Prince Norodom Chakrapong, son of Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk addressed the Club on November 6, seen here with FCCT President Rodney Tasker.



His Royal Highness Prince Norodom Ranariddh, son of Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk addressed the Club on September 18 after screening his first feature film Raja Bori. He is seen here with former FCCT President Philippe Decaux.



Painter Rupali at the launch of her painting exhibition "Trance" on November 1 with Indian Ambassador H.E. Leela Ponappa, and Dr. Prakong Vithayasai with the Executive Committee with the Chiang Mai-based Support the Children Foundation.

Tourism Authority of Thailand Governor K. Juthamas Siriwan spoke at the Club on December 2 during a TAT-hosted programme about the Bangkok International Film Festival set for January 2003.



Whose that girl? Papparazzi at the Club

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is scheduled for the last Friday of each January. That's Friday, January 31, 2003. In addition to electing a new board, that meeting is the best forum for FCCT members to express new ideas and concerns. It is also a time to celebrate the Club. If you have a chance come along and vote and share your ideas. If you wish to vote for the next board but cannot attend be sure to give your proxy votes to another member. Those proxy votes will posted to you in early January.

Thanks for the help

Dear FCCT

My special thanks, of course, goes to all those who allowed me to interview them for my project. There are no better story tellers in this galaxy than you guys. You're at the top of your game and the quality of the interviews show that. I will never forget your kindness and your intellect.

I am still probably a few months away from completion but I thought I'd pass on a small "sample" of the goods, which is a sub-chapter called The Herd, the Pack and the Marathon. Names have been changed and I have instead used names, places and words from Douglas Adams' The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy. In the case of very sensitive data identities have been either completely anonymized or certain details left out in order to cut the scent of the trail.

Chivalry does exist, and it resides in journalism's elite corps - the Southeast Asian based foreign correspondent. Be

proud and know that if you weren't the best of the best you wouldn't be a correspondent. At the moment I have very little to repay the kindness you showed to me, but if in future my situation changes, and I can give something back then I will e.g. contributing to a fund to help SEA-based stringers and their families in times of hardship. That's my promise. My debt to you is great.

Once again many sincere thanks.

All the very best,

Arthur Dent
(AKA John Sample, University of Wales, Swansea)

P.S. The email address I had when I was based in Japan has been changed since I found it nearly always impossible to access it outside of the country. So please use the up-dated one which is: SparrowSample@aol.com

SOI WHISPERS

This isn't gossip or a rumor, not even a half-truth; no smoking at the Club. Well that's the rules anyway. As it stands smoking is banned in all air-conditioned areas where food is served. At the Club the balcony is open for smoking, otherwise the rule is don't get caught. And have heart, Bangkok Governor Samak Sundravej is working to change the rules, or at least bend them a little for bars. With Samak how can anyone lose? If he gets the rules bent for smokers several members have suggested we invite him back to address the Club once again. • Closer to the Club the new stools are now hanging around the bar waiting for drinkers. Drinking by the way remains legal, at least for now. Thanks to the folks who graciously forked over 5,000 baht to pay for each of the new stools. If you want to know who they are have a look at the plaques on the stools, then buy them a drink. • And a toast to Bernard Trink who finally returned to his native Manhattan. The Night Owl returned in the Saturday, Nov. 16 issue of *The New York Times*. Bangkok-based NYT correspondent Seth Mydans wrote the profile. "In 37 years of pub crawling, he has become a monument to the world he writes about—neighborhoods of go-go clubs, beer bars and massage parlors that dispense sex to all comers in an atmosphere of joyous amorality." Nuff said. It's on page 16 of this *Dateline*. • The Hawaiian shirt dude seems to have lost his glasses. John Hail returned to Bangkok from a Los Angeles trip having said Aloha to his glasses while there thanks to laser surgery. Instead he came back with his Comfort 100, read about it on page 20. • Brigid Bose and Sarah Stewart are in a baby race to see who is a mom first. They have the same doctor and are both due in mid-January. Some have suggested they hold off until the FCCT's Annual General Meeting (AGM) the end of January. Wonder if they're get the babies mixed up, if they want, Soi Whispers can recommend a hospital that specializes in such things. • Mira Kim introduced the Siam Society—Mira is on the FCCT board and a council member at the Siam Society, not to mention several other committees—anyway, in November she introduced them to her native Korea's tea tradition which dates back to the 7th century. Might do so for the FCCT in 2003. • And, this just in, the *iTV* court case is still pending. That means they still haven't paid Karuna her back pay so she still isn't buying everybody drinks. But when she does, at least you've have a stool to sit on. • And on a final note, the Annual General Meeting is scheduled for Friday, January 31. Soon-to-be-immediate-past-president Rodney Tasker invites one and all. Come run for a position on the new board. Come share ideas and concerns. Come for a drink on one of the new stools. And, for a smoke. See you on the balcony.

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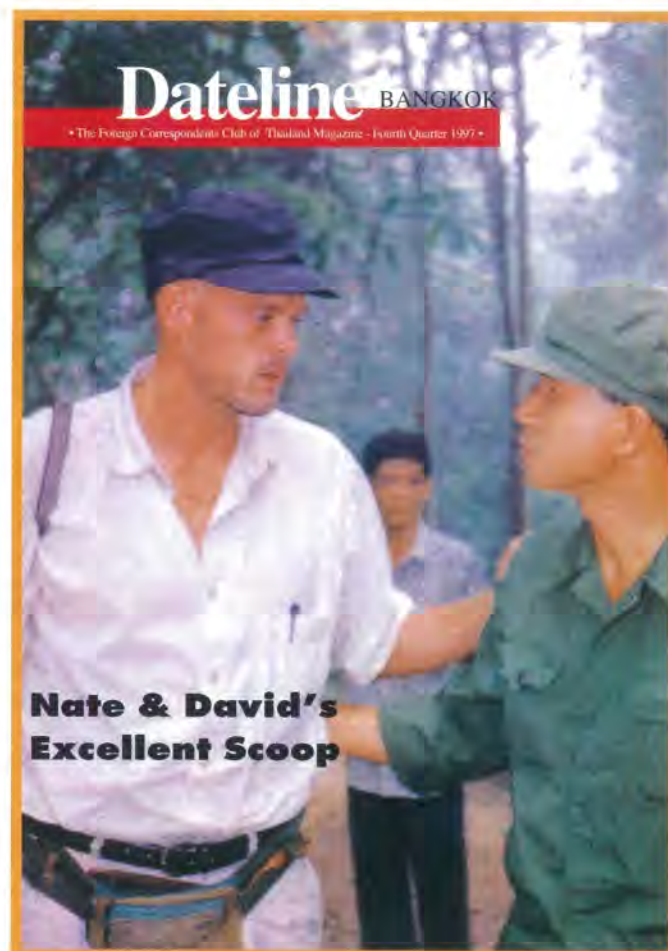
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Nate's Pol Pot Scoop Goes to Court

ABC News pledged on Wednesday (Nov 20) to fight a US\$30-million lawsuit lodged by a US journalist famed for hunting down Cambodian dictator Pol Pot, alleging veteran anchor Ted Koppel and his "Nightline" programme stole his scoop.



Nate Thayer, formerly of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, stunned the world in July 1997 by tracking down the Khmer Rouge tyrant accused of masterminding Cambodia's "Killing Fields" genocide, which left up to 2 million dead.

It was the first time Pol Pot had been seen or photographed for over 20 years.

He accuses Koppel and ABC News of copyright infringement, unfair competition, false designation of origin, breach of contract and unjust enrichment, among other charges.

But ABC argues Thayer has waged a five-year

campaign against the network and says it is looking forward to its day in court.

"In 1997, ABC News agreed to pay a sizable sum of \$350,000 to Nate Thayer for rights to use his videotape of former Cambodian dictator Pol Pot," said ABC News vice president Jeffery Schneider.

"Despite the fact that ABC provided prominent and repeated credit and generous remuneration for his work, Thayer initiated a five-year barrage of complaints coupled with repeated demands for more money that culminated in this filing."

Thayer's complaint, lodged in District Court in Washington DC on October 30, claims he and ABC agreed a deal for the exclusive one-time use in North America of his tape of a Khmer Rouge trail in the Cambodian jungle of ailing Pol Pot, who died in 1998.

But Thayer's lawyers allege ABC's agreement was nothing more than a "ruse" to get Thayer to hand over the tape.

They say the network always planned to release it worldwide as an "ABC News, exclusive and take credit for the video and unlawfully created derivative images."

Thayer, who now lives in Maryland's Eastern shore, contends the network breached a deal to pay him promptly \$350,000, to prevent the use of his images outside North America, and to undertake not to take "frame-grabs" of the film.

ABC also forwarded the images to other news organisation without giving him or the *Review* full credit, the complaint said.

The agreement, was made verbally and when, according to the complaint, Thayer approached Koppel about a written contract, Koppel said: "Don't worry; you must trust me journalist to journalist."

The written contract "never arrived", the complaint said, but admits that ABC sent \$350,000 in payment to Thayer, after he later refused to accept a US journalism award along with "Nightline".

Schneider said the case was a contract dispute: "We find it most unfortunate that Thayer and his lawyers have attempted to attack the name of one of America's most respected news broadcasts as well as a journalist of impeccable reputation."

"We look forward to the opportunity to prove in court that Thayer's five-year-old claims have no merit."—AFP

Information Act Some of the Time

The Official Information Act is for Thai nationals, foreigners cannot use it. But as Kavi Chongkittavorn with *The Nation* says it's proving difficult to use for Thais, too

People are said to be cowed by various forms of official intimidation.

The record on public disclosure of information and enforcement of the Official Information Act over the past five years has been dismal because of the lack of accountability by government officials.

Furthermore, Thai people still do not know the full extent of their right to know and, by and large, are cowed by bureaucratic intimidation in various forms.

These were some of the views expressed in late November at a brainstorming session on the current state of information law in Thailand, organised by the Constitutional Education for Citizens, Active Participation in Reform in Thailand forum.

Thailand became the first Southeast Asian country to enact information legislation in 1997.

In assessing the condition of public access to information following the promulgation of the Official Information Act 1997, Changthong Opa-sirivit, director of the Office of Information Act, gave only 20-to-30 per cent rate of success for efforts to promote public access to information held by the government.

Changthong said that only 60 to 65 per cent of government agencies throughout the country had complied with the law, which states that a specific area must be set aside with information for public inspection.

He added that the 7,000-plus official units always cited budgetary constraints as the main barrier to implementing the law.

A five-year time frame is needed, he pointed out, to promote public access to information and

improve disclosure, which has so far been very time-consuming.

About 100 representatives from relevant government organisations, media, academics and lawyers attended the one-day session, which was sponsored by the American Centre for International Labour Solidarity.

Academics and lawyers agreed that further amendments to the information law are needed in order to promote efficient public access to information.

They urged the government to order all agencies under its control to comply with the law without delay and stop intimidating members of the public who ventured into government offices to demand information.

Meanwhile, they expressed satisfaction over petitions filed against agencies demanding disclosure of information, as eventually all of them abided by the decisions made by various committees on the information law. They said that the whole process could be improved if relevant agencies just used their common sense in public disclosure without further referring to the Information Act office.

They also proposed that the government should give a fixed time frame of one week to respond to public demands for information disclosure. Taking into consideration the different requests and information-gathering process, the length of time could be changed, they added.

The current Information Act, they said, gave too much leeway to officials to avoid making decisions, allowing them to drag their feet because the law mandates them to respond within "a suitable time".

Kavi Chongkittavorn is Assistant Group Editor of The Nation.

ON THE COVER

As is the case with many cover stories these days, this one is misleading. Fact is, the elephant butts are the end of Dateline, as in end of this issue, the back cover. But it's not time to kiss Dateline's ass good-bye just yet. It will return next year in all its splendor. But it may not last long into the New Year. The FCCT struggles on and needs your support. It needs member participation. You don't have to be on the board to help. But, if you want to be on the board mark Friday, January 31 in your journal. Then come to the Annual General Meeting and run. Or just come to share your thoughts on where the Club is and where it should be going? **Turn the elephant around or kiss it good-bye.**

The FCCT Christmas Party



The FCCT would like to thank all those who gave gifts to the Christmas Party Raffle. Particularly Bangkok Airways, Swiss International Airlines, the Sheraton Krabi Beach Resort, the Hua Hin Marriott Resort and Spa, and the Rabbit Resort Jomtien.



To those and all others,
have a **Merry Christmas** and **Happy New Year**

Unreality TV

Television coverage of the poor world has all but disappeared, with disastrous consequences for everyone.

For the past nine months, priests and tribal leaders in West Papua, the easternmost province of Indonesia, have been trying to warn the world that an Islamic fundamentalist movement is using their land as a training ground. Laskar Jihad is commanded by a man trained by Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Some of its members have already been involved in terrorism in the islands of Ambon and Sulawesi. Since January they have established seven bases in West Papua. With the help of the Indonesian police and army, they have been stockpiling arms, recruiting Javanese immigrants and training them for combat.

Since the jihadis arrived, Neles Tebay, a Papuan journalist, has been sending urgent messages to newspapers and broadcasters around the world, desperate to attract attention to this protected terrorist network. But even when eight Pakistani mujahedin arrived, his warnings failed to generate any response in the newspapers of either Europe or North America. The Papuans, ignored and abandoned by the rest of the world, have been reduced to begging the Indonesian authorities to uphold the law and disarm the jihadis before they attack.

The victims of the Bali bombing could be said to have legitimate grounds for complaint not only against the intelligence services (whose efforts have been diverted from unpicking the terrorist networks into supporting two futile wars) but also against the media. Both of them

Our broadcast media are treating the rest of the world as if it is no more than a playground for people like ourselves.

could and should have warned westerners that Indonesia has become a dangerous place for them to visit.

Scarcely a month goes by without a travel feature on the country. One recent programme, about the nightlife in Bali, even featured the Sari Club. But, before the bombing, there had been no recent documentary which could have given viewers any understanding of what was happening in the country.

On Sunday night, the BBC broadcast a fine Panorama programme, seeking to discover who might have planted the bomb, and why the ample warnings the intelligence services received did not prevent the attack. But one of the features of investigative jour-

nalism is surely that it seeks to be wise before the event. There was, as Neles Tebay pointed out, plenty of opportunity for prior wisdom.

One of the great ironies of globalisation is that the closer we are brought together, the less we come to know about each other. As our lives become entwined with those of people living in the most distant places on earth, our broadcast media – through which most people in rich countries receive most of their information – are treating the rest of the world as if it is no more than a playground for people like ourselves. Our understanding diminishes correspondingly, until all we know of foreigners is that, for no reason that we can discern, they suddenly attack us. This is a tragedy not only for the people killed and injured in the Sari Club; but also for the increasingly misunderstood – and therefore increasingly feared and hated – people of the poor world.

Last year, according to the media pressure group 3WE, the coverage of “hard” issues in the poor world on British television fell to the lowest level it had recorded in 12 years of monitoring. While the broadcast hours of international factual programmes rose slightly, nearly all of them were devoted to travel, “reality” shows, docu-soaps, sex, clubbing, surfing and similar mind-numbing cack about Britons making idiots of themselves in exotic places.

In the entire year, only four programmes about the politics of the poor world were broadcast on the five main channels, three of them on BBC2. “The international documentary”, the report concludes, “is virtually dead”. Even after September 11th 2001 there was no discernable improvement.

Much of what we do see of the rest of the world on television could fairly be described as counter-informative. Such local people as the travel programmes permit us to watch appear to have been put upon the earth only to entertain us. Many wildlife documentaries treat the regions they cover as if they are uninhabited. At the beginning of last year, BBC2 broadcast a three-part series on the Congo, which won the Royal Television Society’s science and natural history prize. The existence of human beings was, briefly, acknowledged, but the series informed

us that while the Congo was “once the heart of darkness,” it is now a place of “light”: an odd description of a region devastated by a civil war in which some three million people have died. The war and its associated atrocities were not mentioned.

Television executives claim that programmes about the politics of distant parts of the world attract small audiences. This is true, if one compares them to such indispensable insights into the human condition as “I’m a Celebrity, Get Me out of Here”. But while several million viewers might sit uncomplainingly in front of this pap, or at least leave the television on while they do something more interesting, the smaller numbers who watch serious foreign documentaries will engage with them passionately. John Pilger’s film about East Timor attracted 3 million viewers, of whom an extraordinary half a million called the switchboard afterwards, to register their shock and anger at what they had seen. It would be fair to say that the programme helped to change the course of history.

But films like this are relatively expensive, and unpopular with the advertisers. They can also cause trouble for the people who run the networks. When Pilger’s latest documentary for Carlton TV, about the injustices suffered by the Palestinians, was (predictably enough) attacked by an organised lobby called Honest Reporting, the channel’s proprietor, Michael Green, panicked and denounced it as “a tragedy for Israel so far as accuracy is concerned.”

Encouragingly, he was publicly contradicted by Carlton’s director of factual programmes. But such bravery is rare among television executives. The physical courage of the freelance camera people and journalists, who risk their lives to film the world’s forgotten atrocities, is matched only by the moral cowardice of the managers who then refuse even to talk to them, let alone to run their footage.

Not long ago, the investigative film-makers’ principal constraints were technical: the camera equipment was cumbersome, the film stock was fragile, transporting it was hazardous. Those constraints have now been overcome, just as the market for their footage has disappeared.

Mass Media a Key Player in Economic Development

The customer buying a newspaper at a Paris kiosk, a Moscow shop or Ugandan newsstand probably does not dream that such a simple act affects economic development. But buying a newspaper can feed more than the mind in poor countries: It can help reduce poverty, improve living standards and make economies grow, says a new World Bank report published in March.

The study “The Right to Tell – The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development” demonstrates that media not only have a political impact, but also economic and social.

Launched by the World Bank and the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) at a joint news conference here on November 4, the report offers research and scientific analysis which demonstrate that newspapers, television and radio can improve living standards.

However, their success in stimulating economic development depends on their independence, quality and ability to reach a wide audience, it says.

Mark Nelson, a World Bank Institute program manager, told reporters the book marks an “important milestone” in the World Bank’s work.

Nelson, a former Wall Street Journal reporter who contributed to the report, said the Bank has made an effort to work with developing countries to build a free press in recent years.

This report is “the beginning of the debate” on the importance of the media, he said, adding that the issue had become increasingly important in the Bank’s talks with individual countries in the past five years.

WAN director general Timothy Balding said: “This is the most serious and substantial contribution we have yet seen to the research, analysis and arguments on the positive role of a free press in economic development and the reduction of poverty.”

“Perhaps for the first time on any scale,

this World Bank report goes well beyond the simple argument that access to free information and a free press is a human right, moral and a self-evident good thing, to start proving the case scientifically that a strong, independent and free press is a powerful ally to economic and social development and the reduction of poverty.”

“The Right to Tell” includes 19 chapters from a wide range of authors including Nobel laureate and former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, “Irrational Exuberance” author Robert Shiller and Nobel Prize-winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Writers from the developing world describe the media’s challenges in various countries, including the former Soviet Union, Thailand and Zimbabwe.

Contributors explore the role of the media as a watchdog that can increase the accountability of both governments and businesses through quality reporting while allowing consumers to make more informed decisions.

Corporate governance, an ethical issue that recently has become a global buzzword following US accounting and corruption scandals, was pushed onto radar screens by tough investigative reporting. WAN’s Balding said the publication of the report illustrates how the issue of a free press has moved up on the agenda.

In post-1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, WAN asked the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for help to build a free press.

“We got no response whatsoever,” he said.

In Afghanistan, a free press is on the agenda, whereas 10 years ago it would not have been, he noted. Saying there was “a long way to go yet,” Balding called for “a veritable Marshall Plan” for Africa and other developing countries.

He challenged the World Bank to “put its dollars where its arguments lie.” —AFP

Serving as Guide to a Richly Tawdry Bazaar

Bernard Trink walked into the newsroom and sat down at a gigantic battered typewriter. He took off his shoes, tugged off his socks, unbuckled his belt, unzipped his pants and leaned back, ready to talk.

It was 8 p.m., the start of a working day that would last until dawn, and he had messages to sort, doggerel to read, jokes to chuckle over, nightspots to recommend and prostitutes to visit.

Mr. Trink, 71, is what he likes to call the entertainment editor of the *Bangkok Post* — a chronicler, critic and booster of the red-light industry here in what he dubs Fun City.

In 37 years of pub crawling, he has become a monument to the world he writes about — neighborhoods of go-go clubs, beer bars and massage parlors that dispense sex to all comers in an atmosphere of joyous amorality.

Caravansaries, he calls them in the odd patois he has created; boîtes, dramshops, gin mills, taprooms, watering holes, all offering damsels, lasses, demimondaines and maidens.

His quirky column, Nite Owl, is a pifia of his crochets and hobbyhorses, bursting not only with news of the bar scene but with aphorisms, oddball definitions, cautionary tales, Burma Shave ditties, rumors and stern warnings never to reply to a Nigerian scam letter and never, ever to marry a bar girl.

His opinions are offered with an emphatic snap of the finger. "The mind boggles," he will write or, "Need I say more" or, "brooking no debate," Nuff said.

The moment it comes off the press each week, his column is a historical treasure, part of an unbroken chronicle of one of the world's great pleasure palaces.

He was here when it all started, in the 1960's, when American soldiers on leave from Vietnam whooped and reveled in the streets and farm girls converged from around the country, amazed at the bright lights and the dollars, for a party that has never ended.

The G.I.'s are gone now but the bars are still packed, as if there were no such thing as AIDS. The new generation of patrons is the older generation — graying travelers giving themselves one more go at

youth. This is the age of Viagra, and Mr. Trink is its siren.

The columnist himself is not so young any more. His face, with its long, emphatic nose, is not as sleek as it once was, and his Julius Caesar haircut looks a bit as if someone had sat on it.

At his typewriter, he produces genuine antiques pecked out on a private stash of foolscap so old and brittle that he sometimes needs Scotch tape to repair it.

But late on a Sunday night, he can still be seen making his rounds of nightspots, limping a bit on his swollen feet, sometimes carrying with him a couple of plastic bags of shopping. A few steps behind, where she has always been, is his Thai wife, Aree.

A Red Cross volunteer and the mother of their three children, she has long since taken his eccentricities for granted, a wordless shadow. But people who meet him for the first time may need a moment to adapt.

Noticing a visitor glancing at his partial dishabille the other day, he said, without further explanation: "Whenever I sit down I unzip, no matter where

I am. Having done it, I feel comfortable. There's no belt digging in."

Born in Manhattan in a struggling Depression-era family, with a mother

who he says "wasn't a lovable person," the young Bernard Trink buried himself in books and movies and dreamed of becoming a professor of history.

In his early 20's he set off to see the world and visited, by his count, 50 countries before finding a wife in Thailand and settling down in 1965 to work for a newspaper. Almost immediately he took over the Nite Owl column in the now defunct Bangkok World, and it quickly became the crown jewel of journalism in what was then a raw and sweaty city.

It was a must-read account of his week on the town, with racy photographs of go-go dancers and a sort of Zagat guide to massage parlors, with prostitutes identified by the badge numbers they wore.

"I used special code words," he said: "Go to see Number 47 because she's special."

"If I said she's 'extra special,' that would refer to particular services and the reader knew what I

meant," he said. "If I said she was great, people would line up to be with her. It's like an art expert; when you've had a few you can compare."

This is a man who can say with real feeling, "I had the perfect job."

THOSE days — "the high point of the column" — are a wistful memory now. Mr. Trink's new readers wear neckties and work in air-conditioned offices, and Nite Owl has struggled to adapt. The column still carries tips for barflies like "Monokini dancing at Nana Entertainment Plaza — Have a look-see" and "Hollywood Carousel (third floor N.E.P.), run by Johnny, has had a second carousel (revolving dance stage) installed with additional damsels."

But the truth is that Mr. Trink has been tamed by changing times. The paper has told him to back off his crusade to prove that AIDS is nothing but a money-making fabrication of pharmaceutical companies.

No longer allowed to recommend his favorite prostitutes, he sometimes touts grocery items, with a strange, Nixonian seriousness.

"For years Tang (orange powder to mix with water) was my favorite beverage, until, at 200 baht a bottle, the taste was no longer worth the price," he told readers recently.

"It's happened again with Gillette foam and gel, over 190 baht for a half-can. I've switched to Orita body lotion with some olive oil mixed in — 65 baht a bottle (at Watsons). A reader tells me he shaves with hair shampoo. Both are effective and economical. Check 'em out."

For a long time he tracked the fluctuating price of Dinty Moore's beef stew, until "I kind of felt I'd said all there is to say about it."

On occasion, he passes on a reader's recommendation of a good podiatrist or praise for the medicinal properties of bananas, along with the comment, "I have no way of knowing whether this is true."

Perhaps his greatest service over the years — all too often ignored — has been to warn Western men, known in Thai as farangs, not to give their hearts away to the calculating women in the bars.

"Though demimondaines generally don't have much schooling, don't underestimate their smarts," he wrote recently to a man who said he had found true love. "With a few exceptions, they can buy and sell farangs of any age, however educated and wary. Just don't believe the sweet talk. If you do, it'll cost you, I'll clue ya. Get it out of your head that you're going to reform them. TIT (This Is Thailand)."

Clearly, Mr. Trink is no romantic. But he has had a lot of fun over the years. Every one of his columns concludes with his raffish motto, "But, I don't give a hoot!"

"It's nice to have good sex with someone you love," he said the other day, summing up his years as a night owl. "But that doesn't mean you can't have good sex with someone you don't love."

Nuff said.



YVAN COHEN/ASIAWORKS

Seth Mydans is a NYT Correspondent.

Looking Behind Borders

Reporters Without Borders published their first worldwide press freedom index in October which offered a few surprises, particularly for Western democracies. The United States ranks below Costa Rica and Italy scores lower than Benin. The five countries with least press freedom are North Korea, China, Burma, Turkmenistan and Bhutan.

Reporters Without Borders is publishing for the first time a worldwide index of countries according to their respect for press freedom. It also shows that such freedom is under threat everywhere, with the 20 bottom-ranked countries drawn from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. The situation is especially bad in Asia, which contains the five worst offenders – North Korea, China, Burma, Turkmenistan and Bhutan.

The top end of the list shows that rich countries have no monopoly of press freedom. Costa Rica and Benin are examples of how growth of a free press does not just depend on a country's material prosperity.

The index was drawn up by asking journalists, researchers and legal experts to answer 50 questions about the whole range of press freedom violations (such as murders or arrests of journalists, censorship, pressure, state monopolies in various fields, punishment of press law offences and regulation of the media). The final list includes 139 countries. The others were not included in the absence of reliable information.

In the worst-ranked countries, press freedom is a dead letter and independent newspapers do not exist. The only voice heard is of media tightly controlled or monitored by the government. The very few independent journalists are constantly harassed, imprisoned or forced into exile by the authorities. The foreign media is banned or allowed in very small doses, always closely monitored.

Right at the top of the list four countries share first place – Finland, Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands. These northern European states scrupulously respect press freedom in their own countries but also speak up for it elsewhere, for example recently in Eritrea

and Zimbabwe. The highest-scoring country outside Europe is Canada, which comes fifth.

Some countries with democratically-elected governments are way down in the index – such as Colombia (114th) and Bangladesh (118th). In these countries, armed rebel movements, militias or political parties constantly endanger the lives of journalists. The state fails to do all it could to protect them and fight the immunity very often enjoyed by those responsible for such violence.

COSTA RICA BETTER PLACED THAN THE UNITED STATES

The poor ranking of the United States (17th) is mainly because of the number of journalists arrested or imprisoned there. Arrests are often because they refuse to reveal their sources in court. Also, since the 11 September attacks, several journalists have been arrested for crossing security lines at some official buildings.

The highest-ranked country of the South is Costa Rica, in 15th position. This Central American nation is traditionally the continent's best performer in terms of press freedom. In February 2002, it ceased to be one of the 17 Latin American states that still give prison sentences to those found guilty of "insulting" public officials. The murder in July 2001 year of journalist Parmenio Medina was an exception in the history of the Costa Rican media.

Cuba, the last dictatorship in Latin America, came 134th and is the only country in the region where there is no diversity of news and journalists are routinely imprisoned. In Haiti (106th), journalists are targeted by informal militias whose actions are covered by the government.

ITALY GETS BAD MARKS IN EUROPE

The 15 member-countries of the European Union (EU) all score well except for Italy (40th), where news diversity is under serious threat. Prime minister Silvio Berlusconi is turning up the pressure on the state-

owned television stations, has named his henchmen to help run them and continues to combine his job as head of government with being boss of a privately-owned media group. The imprisonment of journalist Stefano Surace, convicted of press offences from 30 years ago, as well as the monitoring of journalists, searches, unjustified legal summonses and confiscation of equipment, are all responsible for the country's low ranking.

France, in 11th place overall, comes only 8th among EU countries because of several disturbing measures endangering the protection of journalists' sources and because of police interrogation of a number of journalists in recent months.

Among those states hoping to join the EU, Turkey (99th) is very poorly placed. Despite the reform efforts of its government, aimed at easing entry into the EU, many journalists are still being given prison sentences and the media is regularly censored. Press freedom is especially under siege in the southeastern part of the country.

Elsewhere in Europe, such as Belarus (124th), Russia (121st) and the former Soviet republics, it is still difficult to work as a journalist and several have been murdered or imprisoned. Grigory Pasko, jailed since December 2001 in the Vladivostok region of Russia, was given a four-year sentence for publishing pictures of the Russian Navy pouring liquid radioactive waste into the Sea of Japan.

THE MIDDLE EAST AND ISRAEL'S AMBIVALENT POSITION

No Arab country is among the top 50. Lebanon only makes 56th place and the press freedom situation in the region is not encouraging. In Iraq (130th) and Syria (126th), the state uses every means to control the media and stifle any dissenting voice. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein especially has set his country's media the sole task of relaying his regime's propaganda. In Libya (129th) and Tunisia (128th), no criticism of Col Muammar Kadhafi or President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali is tolerated.

The political weakening of the Palestinian Authority (82nd) means it has made few assaults on press freedom. However, Islamic fundamentalist opposition media have been closed, several attempts made to intimidate and attack local and foreign journalists and

many subjects remain taboo. The aim is to convey a united image of the Palestinian people and to conceal aspects such as demonstrations of support for attacks on Israel.

The attitude of Israel (92nd) towards press freedom is ambivalent. Despite strong pressure on state-owned TV and radio, the government respects the local media's freedom of expression. However, in the West Bank and Gaza, Reporters Without Borders has recorded a large number of violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantees press freedom and which Israel has signed. Since the start of the Israeli army's incursions into Palestinian towns and cities in March 2002, very many journalists have been roughed up, threatened, arrested, banned from moving around, targeted by gunfire, wounded or injured, had their press cards withdrawn or been deported.

GOOD AND BAD EXAMPLES IN AFRICA

Eritrea (132nd) and Zimbabwe (122nd) are the most repressive countries of sub-Saharan Africa. The entire privately-owned press in Eritrea was banned by the government in September 2001 and 18 journalists are currently imprisoned there. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is notable for his especially harsh attitude to the foreign and opposition media.

At the other end of the spectrum, Benin is in 21st place despite being classified by the UN Development Programme as one of the world 15 poorest countries. Other African states, such as South Africa (26th), Mali (43rd), Namibia (31st) and Senegal (47th), have genuine press freedom too.

HOW THE INDEX WAS DRAWN UP

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world, as well as the right to inform the public and to be informed, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Reporters Without Borders has nine national sections (in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), representatives in Abidjan, Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Istanbul, Montreal, Moscow, Nairobi, New York, Tokyo and Washington and more than a hundred correspondents worldwide.

THE INDEX

Rank Country Note

1	Finland	0,50
2	Iceland	0,50
3	Norway	0,50
4	Netherlands	0,50
5	Canada	0,75
6	Ireland	1,00
7	Germany	1,50
8	Portugal	1,50
9	Sweden	1,50
10	Denmark	3,00
11	France	3,25

12	Australia	3,50
13	Belgium	3,50
14	Slovenia	4,00
15	Costa Rica	4,25
16	Switzerland	4,25
17	United States	4,75
18	Hong Kong	4,83
19	Greece	5,00
20	Ecuador	5,50
21	Benin	6,00
22	United Kingdom	6,00
23	Uruguay	6,00
24	Chile	6,50
25	Hungary	6,50
26	South Africa	7,50

27	Austria	7,50
28	Japan	7,50
29	Spain	7,75
30	Poland	7,75
31	Namibia	8,00
32	Paraguay	8,50
33	Croatia	8,75
34	El Salvador	8,75
35	Taiwan	9,00
36	Mauritius	9,50
37	Peru	9,50
38	Bulgaria	9,75
39	South Korea	10,50
40	Italy	11,00
41	Czech Republic	11,25

42	Argentina	2,00
43	Bosnia and Herzegovina	12,50
44	Mali	12,50
45	Romania	13,25
46	Cape Verde	13,75
47	Senegal	14,00
48	Bolivia	14,50
49	Nigeria	15,50
50	Panama	15,50
51	Sri Lanka	15,75
52	Uganda	17,00
53	Niger	18,50
54	Brazil	18,75
55	Ivory Coast	19,00

56	Lebanon	19,67
57	Indonesia	20,00
58	Comoros	20,50
59	Gabon	20,50
60	Yugoslavia	20,75
61	Seychelles	20,75
62	Tanzania	21,25
63	Central African Republic	21,50
64	Gambia	22,50
65	Madagascar	22,75
66	Thailand	22,75
67	Bahrain	23,00
68	Ghana	23,00
69	Congo	23,17

70	Mozambique	23,50
71	Cambodia	24,25
72	Burundi	24,50
73	Mongolia	24,50
74	Sierra Leone	24,50
75	Kenya	24,75
76	Mexico	24,75
77	Venezuela	25,00
78	Kuwait	25,50
79	Guinea	26,00
80	India	26,50
81	Zambia	26,75
82	Palestinian National Authority	27,00
83	Guatemala	27,25

84	Malawi	27,67
85	Burkina Faso	27,75
86	Tajikistan	28,25
87	Chad	28,75
88	Cameroon	28,83
89	Morocco	29,00
90	Philippines	29,00
91	Swaziland	29,00
92	Israel	30,00
93	Angola	30,17
94	Guinea-Bissau	30,25
95	Algeria	31,00
96	Djibouti	31,25
97	Togo	31,50
98	Kyrgyzstan	31,75

99	Jordan	33,50
100	Turkey	33,50
101	Azerbaijan	34,50
102	Egypt	34,50
103	Yemen	34,75
104	Afghanistan	35,50
105	Sudan	36,00
106	Haiti	36,50
107	Ethiopia	37,50
108	Rwanda	37,50
109	Liberia	37,75
110	Malaysia	37,83
111	Brunei	38,00
112	Ukraine	40,00
113	Democratic Republic	

of the Congo	40,75
114 Colombia	40,83
115 Mauritania	41,33
116 Kazakhstan	42,00
117 Equatorial Guinea	42,75
118 Bangladesh	43,75
119 Pakistan	44,67
120 Uzbekistan	45,00
121 Russia	48,00
122 Iran	48,25
123 Zimbabwe	48,25
124 Belarus	52,17
125 Saudi Arabia	62,50
126 Syria	62,83
127 Nepal	63,00

128	Tunisia	67,75
129	Libya	72,50
130	Iraq	79,00
131	Vietnam	81,25
132	Eritrea	83,67
133	Laos	89,00
134	Cuba	90,25
135	Bhutan	90,75
136	Turkmenistan	91,50
137	Burma	96,83
138	China	97,00
139	North Korea	97,50

Bad Old Days of Bangkok Traffic Jams Creeping Back

Dust off your Comfort 100s, ladies and gentlemen, the bad old days are back as Bangkok races to reclaim its reputation as the most traffic-choked city in the world.



Memories... the way we were... and are.

Portable plastic urinals were marketed under the brand name Comfort 100 during the late 1980s and early '90s, offering some relief to long-suffering Bangkok commuters who routinely spent two or three hours stuck in glacially slow traffic between home and office.

"When I came here in 1988 it was certainly very bad," recalled Peter Hodgkinson, a British transport economist based in Bangkok for the past 14 years. "At that time I was spending five hours a day traveling, two and a half hours to the office and two and a half hours back."

For the next decade — Thailand's economic boom years — traffic continued to get worse as a frantic road building campaign tried but failed to keep up with the nearly 500 new cars added to the congestion each day.

Accelerating local vehicle sales were fueled by the boom, and by the government's avowed policy of creating an auto-manufacturing "Detroit of Southeast Asia" along Thailand's eastern seaboard.

Then the financial bubble burst in July 1997, spreading throughout the region, and the nascent auto industry, along with most other industrial activity, ground to a near standstill.

But the traffic started moving. The financial crash succeeded in doing what a succession of governments had failed to do as thousands of commuters either opted for public transport or stayed home.

"I noticed that traffic levels began to drop off dramatically," Hodgkinson said. "I guess there was a lot of discretionary traveling that just wasn't happening."

The Skytrain, Bangkok's first urban rail mass

transit system, opened in December 1999 and added to the public perception that Bangkok's days as the world's most traffic-clogged city were truly over.

But now, as the Thai economy shows signs of getting out of the slow lane and oil prices remain relatively stable, gridlock is making a comeback in Bangkok.

Sitting paralyzed in Bangkok traffic, commuters' tempers are again starting to crack.

"The police are as inept as they ever were in controlling the situation," Hodgkinson complained. "I don't think they've got any hope or possibility of controlling the traffic at major intersections. They seem to have some sort of override on the traffic lights, and then never get it right. I just don't think the government is doing anything at all."

Meanwhile, during the first quarter of 2002, car and truck sales in Thailand rose more than a third over the same period last year. Domestic sales accounted for about two thirds of overall production, which rose to 148,346 units built between January and April, according to the Federation of Thai Industries.

Minkwan Sangsuwan, a spokesman for local market leader Toyota Motor Thailand, described the first quarter sales figures as "a very good signal for the economic recovery".

"The dealers are engaged in heavy sales campaigns, offering special deals on car leasing," he said. "Many new models have been introduced to the market. Also, interest rates are very low and attractive to buyers."

Thailand's industrial and political leaders rarely seem to make the connection between the dream of creating a "Southeast Asian Detroit" and the nightmare of Bangkok traffic.

"If you follow the economic condition, you see that the auto sales seem to be one of the first things to recover," said Prapon Wongvichien, director of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's Traffic and Transportation Department.

He said auto sales have now recovered to the point where between 400 and 700 new vehicles are added to the streets of Bangkok every day.

"Yes, surprisingly it's even more than before (the '97 collapse)," Prapon said. "The government has a very difficult situation because on the one hand we'd like to promote economic development and recovery but on the other hand we have to relieve the traffic condition. Sales of automobiles, that is one of the indicators of economic recovery. So it's quite a conflict of interest."

He said proposals have been made to introduce some of the methods used by Singapore and other countries that have succeeded in keeping traffic at a manageable level, such as limiting registrations and denying access to some inner city streets.

But such proposals have been quickly shot down by Thailand's powerful automotive lobby.

"If we try to reduce the number of car sales it will affect the car manufacturers and other related businesses," Prapon said. "It's a political issue."

Words Alternate Meanings

The Washington Post annually publishes a contest for readers in which they were asked to supply alternate meanings for various words. The following were some of the winning entries in this year's contest:

1. Coffee (n.), a person who is coughed upon.
2. Flabbergasted (adj.), appalled over how much weight you have gained.
3. Abdicate (v.), to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.
4. Esplanade (v.), to attempt an explanation while drunk.
5. Willy-nilly (adj.), impotent
6. Negligent (adj.), describes a condition in which you absentmindedly answer the door in your nightie.
7. Lymph (v.), to walk with a lisp.
8. Gargoyle (n.), an olive-flavored mouthwash.
9. Flatulence (n.) the emergency vehicle that picks you up after you are run over by a steamroller.
10. Baldersdash (n.), a rapidly receding hairline.
11. Testicle (n.), a humorous question on an exam.
12. Rectitude (n.), the formal, dignified demeanor assumed by a proctologist immediately before he examines you.
13. Oyster (n.), a person who sprinkles his conversation with Yiddish expressions.
14. Circumvent (n.), the opening in the front of boxer shorts.
15. Frisbeetarianism (n.), The belief that, when you die, your soul goes up on the roof and gets stuck there.
16. Pokemon (n), A Jamaican proctologist

Each year the Washington Post's Style Invitational asks readers to take any word from the dictionary alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing one letter and then supply a new definition. Here are the 2001 winners:

1. Intoxication: Euphoria at getting a tax refund, which lasts until you realize it was your money to start with.
2. Reintarnation: Coming back to life as a hillbilly.
3. Foreplay: Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of getting laid (familiar to all men).
4. Giraffiti: Vandalism spray-painted very, very high.
5. Sarchasm: The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn't get it.
6. Inoculate: To take coffee intravenously when you are running late.
7. Hipatitis: Terminal coolness.
8. Osteopornosis: A degenerate disease. (this one got extra credit)
9. Karmageddon: It's like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the earth explodes and it's like, a serious bummer.
10. Glibido: All talk and no action.
11. Dopeler Effect: The tendency of stupid ideas to seem smarter when they come at you rapidly.

And, the pick of the literature:

12. Ignoramus: A person who's both stupid and an asshole.

Travels in Yunnan

Eating, drinking, and smoking with the hill tribes

By Mick Elmore

The Exploration of Yunnan
By Jim Goodman
Yunnan People's Publishing House,
629 pp, baht
Available at the FCCT

Ten years in the making Jim Goodman's "The Exploration of Yunnan" offers insight into a remote and fascinating but changing region. He concentrates on the hill tribes and the book is an "ethnological exploration", not a guidebook, Jim says.

The book's strong point is Jim's access to the ethnic minorities. He has visited every prefecture at least once and dealing with the ethnic minorities proved the most interesting part of traveling. Little is written about the hill tribes but Jim found they opened up to him after second and third visits to their villages. Some minority groups proved more approachable than others.

"I approached some Lisu in the southwest and they ran away so fast they knocked over other people in the market. Everybody just laughed at them. But I go back the second, third or fourth time and nobody runs away," he said.

Learning to say a few things in the local languages opens a lot of doors and he has four rules he follows when dealing with ethnic minorities.

"I eat whatever they give me, drink whatever they give me, smoke whatever they give me, and sleep wherever they put me. That way they're at ease and their hospitality works," he said.

Since first visiting in 1992 he's spent a total four years in China's southwest province in a series of one-month visits. Yunnan has 24 minority groups by China's classification of an ethnic group with a minimum 5,000 people, and they make up one-third

of the province's 40 million people. Goodman has spent time with each group and his book is an introduction to those people through the inquisitive eyes of a visiting foreigner. He offers descriptions to let the reader know what minority existence is all about.

His strong photos are a great addition to the book.

Yunnan is opening and the ways of the various hill tribes are rapidly changing and Jim said he also wanted to catalogue what it

mitted a cultural revivalism.

"At that point they stopped trying to turn them into Hun style communist. But at first the minorities didn't take it seriously because they were afraid of another campaign to flush them out or something," Jim said.

But over time they slowly gained confidence in the revivalism. In part because some locals were elected to regional offices.

Most of the ethnic groups still held onto most of their beliefs, although in a more secretive way during Beijing's oppressive years. So in a sense it is easy for them to make a comeback because their culture was still there.

One growing practice in China is commerce and tourism to the "wild places" of Yunnan offers a fertile market.

That is a threat to many things, Jim says, adding what the communist couldn't destroy commercial tourism may well finish off.

"I had this feeling it was important to do this. It is an historical situation and it may not last. Or it may be the beginning of something else. My question is whether this is the last gasp of the old traditions or whether there is a reinterpretation that will last into the future," Jim said.

Jim has watched the region open up with both fascination and concern. During his first visits in 1992 two-thirds of the province was closed to foreigners. Slowly the entire province opened and by 1999 travelers were allowed to go anywhere. Visas are not a problem and authorities never questioned why Jim went four or five times a year on 30-day visas.

At the same time thousands of kilometers of new roads have made access easier. Although corners of the province remain difficult to get to most are accessible by mini-buses, tractor-trailers or small vehicles.

"Getting in is no problem. Getting around is easier every year," he said.



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