

# DATELINE

A woman in traditional Tibetan dress, including a white fur hat and a long dress with horizontal stripes of red, white, green, yellow, and blue, stands with her arms raised in a celebratory gesture. She is smiling and looking upwards. The background shows a clear blue sky with some clouds and a glimpse of a Tibetan-style building in the distance.

BANGKOK

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF TH

FOURTH QUARTER 2006

## CHINA RISING

*China's Impact  
on SE Asia*

*On the Road to  
Mandalay...*

*Train to Tibet*

**Prime  
Minister  
Dinner**

**Denis Gray's  
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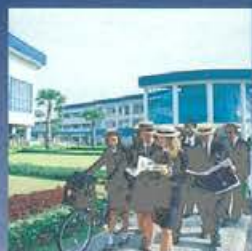
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### FEEDING THE MACHINE

Dateline magazine looks at the stories behind the stories. All offerings will be considered, from articles and photo essays to letters, essays, haiku or sonnets. How you covered a story, what you think about how journalism works, or even some gossip for the Soi Whispers column — send it all in, to editor Patrick Barta (Patrick.Barta@wsj.com) or deputy editor Azhar Sukri (azharhsukri@yahoo.co.uk). Submissions are paid for with glory and bar coupons.



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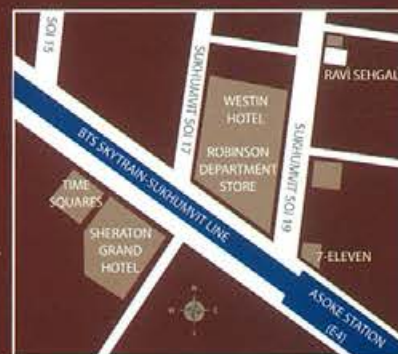
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By Ian Williams, President



When I first proposed the story, my editor thought I was joking. "A labour shortage? In China?" I might as well have been suggesting a story on beach holidays in Siberia or whale watching in land-locked Laos. It made no sense to him. After all, wasn't China becoming the workshop of the world, with a limitless supply of cheap labour?

Well, up to a point, I explained, and after some patient diplomacy found myself on a flight to southern China, where the booming Pearl River Delta is home to some thirty million migrant workers churning out a good proportion of the world's output of everything from shoes to toys. And, yes, they were short of labour. They reckoned they needed at least another two million workers. Factory owners, hardly renowned for their generosity in this part of the world, talked grudgingly of how they had to improve wages and conditions to attract and keep new workers.

The head of one Dongguan job market told me: "In the past we had ten workers chasing every job. Now nobody is applying. Now workers are becoming picky, they're shopping around for the best deal."

That was two years ago, and since then the trend has continued, as the demand for labour in China's booming factories falls short of supply. The International Herald Tribune recently reported that higher costs were resulting in higher export prices and giving some foreign investors - who've been stampeding into China - pause for thought.

The impact of this is likely to be two-fold: first, China may no longer be relied on to keep global inflation in check, as an exporter of ever-lower priced goods; and secondly it challenges the conventional wisdom of the Peoples' Republic as being on an unstoppable industrial juggernaut, gobbling up the world's natural resources, sucking in the lion's share of foreign investment and crushing all low-priced competition (including Thailand) before it.

That conventional wisdom seems to be shared by Pridiyathorn Devakula, the former head of Thailand's Central Bank, and the economic tsar of the new Surayud-government, who spoke recently about the "threat" of rapid economic growth in China and India.

"China and India have cheap human resources and huge domestic markets which make them key rivals of Thailand in terms of attracting trade and investment," he told reporters, urging Thailand to find new ways to compete to avoid being left behind in the global economy.

His government's recent clumsy imposition - then partial lifting - of capital controls will hardly have helped Thailand's case, coming as foreign investors nervously watch the post-coup situation here, and in particular the future of the foreign business law.

The law as it now stands is absurdly protectionist, which is why so many investment deals have been structured in a way

## PRESIDENT'S DESK

that sidesteps its more onerous provisions. The government should be looking at ways of reforming the law, not penalising the companies that have skirted it. It is issues like this that will determine Thailand's ability to compete with China, and also with rising Vietnam, seen increasingly as the most welcoming alternative to China.

Asian leaders also fret about China's greater political muscle in a region that in security terms has been close to the United States. Are they right to worry?

While I think Thailand is particularly vulnerable, I own up to being a bit of a sceptic when it comes to the broader "China threat". As the looming labour shortage illustrates, there are plenty of potholes on the road to economic super-powerdom. There are limits to which jobs can be lost to China.

At the same time, Beijing's leaders have so many problems at home created by the rapid, yet wild and chaotic growth of a market economy that (with the possible exception of Taiwan) they are in no real mood to throw their weight around politically on the world stage - though they are prepared to deal with some pretty unsavoury regimes in pursuit of natural resources.

This edition of Dateline looks at the rise of China and the impact on the rest of Asia, particularly Thailand and Burma. We have a story from Milton Osborne, the noted Australian diplomat and academic, in which he looks at the various ways - social, political and economic - that China is affecting the region. We also look at the way China is devouring Burma, in its unprincipled quest for natural resources and strategic advantage - and in spite of the enormous and corrosive impact Burmese-produced drugs are having on China's neighbouring Yunnan Province.

We also have a remarkable photo-essay from Paula Bronstein, who took the new Chinese train service into Tibet. She looks at how Chinese culture is changing Lhasa.

On a final note, perhaps the most visible impact on Thailand of China's rise is in the number of Chinese tourists - a million last year and growing rapidly as the country's newly affluent head abroad. They are now the single biggest group of visitors to Pattaya.

But a big proportion of these have been what the industry has dubbed "zero dollar tours", packages sold at well below cost to get the gullible (and often first time) tourist to Thailand, where the scams begin as they are herded by unscrupulous tour guides between jewelry shops, rip-off restaurants and dubious nightspots, all at inflated prices.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand says they will crack down on these cheats, but in the meantime it has generated a lot of bad publicity in China, with many claiming it is symptomatic of the way the Thais do business. Symptomatic or not, it's hardly an encouraging sign of Thailand's ability to handle the challenges and opportunities posed to the region by China's rise.



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## FCCT PHOTO CONTEST

**Southeast Asia is home to some of the best photojournalists in the region. So why shouldn't they get more credit?**

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand is happy to announce its first Annual FCCT Photojournalism Awards, a new contest designed to recognize the finest photo work in the region.

**Who's Eligible?** Any photographer – professional or amateur – working in Southeast Asia. (defined as: Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, or Brunei). Photographers do not need to be members of FCCT.

**What Kind of Photos?** We're keeping it simple. There will be four categories. In each category we will select a winner, a runner-up, and an honorable mention. The categories are:

- Spot News, for the best photo taken at a news event
- Enterprise/Feature Photography, for the best non-news photo
- Sport Photography, for the best photo of a regional sporting event
- Photo Essay, for the best collection of up to 12 photos on a single topic

In addition, the panel of judges will select one Photo of the Year from all submissions.

**What Can You Win?:** All winners (including runners-up and honorable mentions) will be featured in a special edition of Dateline designed to profile their work. The cover will be devoted to the Photo of the Year. In addition, FCCT will sponsor a month-long exhibition of the prize-winning



Photo: Patrick Barta

photos, including a Friday night reception, all of which will be promoted through local media. The Photo of the Year will be added to FCCT's permanent collection and that photographer will receive a special plaque honoring his or her work. Additional prizes will be announced later as sponsors sign on to the event.

**What's the Deadline?** Photos must be submitted on compact disc – along with the information requested below – to FCCT by the deadline of **April 15, 2007**. Photos will then be judged by a panel of Bangkok photographers established by the FCCT. Submissions can be published OR unpublished work. The photos must have been taken after January 1, 2006. When submitting photos, please indicate which category(s) you plan to enter. Winners will be announced on May, 2007.

Name:  
Category for submission(s):  
Approx. date(s) photos taken:  
Brief biography:  
Contact details:

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Calling all filmmakers – and students of Laos history:

For more than nine years, the quiet tranquility of Viengxay – a humble community in the Annamite mountain range of Laos – was totally and brutally interrupted as part of the U.S. effort to halt the spread of Communism across Indochina. In 1962, the Lao Communist party – the Pathet Lao – fled from the capital in Vientiane across the enigmatic Plain of Jars and, in 1964, took shelter and refuge in the limestone caves of Viengxay. Soon afterwards, Viengxay became a key target for the might of the US Air Force, which unleashed a phenomenal and sustained bombardment. Some 23,000 people took to Viengxay's 200 caves.

Now, for the first time in the thirty years since the war ended, the government of the Lao PDR is opening up the Viengxay caves to international tourists – to explain what occurred over this astonishing period of world history, and to help ensure future generations of Laotians understand

their past. This move brings with it enormous opportunities – not least to produce a TV documentary or feature film for the world market. Either of these steps will make a huge contribution towards 'making poverty history' for the people of Viengxay.

The Lao government has requested SNV, the Netherlands Development Organisation, to help develop the tourism potential of the caves and surrounding area. A detailed strategy to achieve this aim has been set out. One of the key ideas is to encourage journalists to visit the site to write about its potential as a tourist destination, or even to make a documentary film tracing its incredible and little-known history.

A personalised visit to the Lao PDR and Viengxay to fully assess the potential of this concept, and discuss planning options with the Lao government and local agencies, can be arranged by contacting Paul Rogers at: [progers@snvworld.org](mailto:progers@snvworld.org).

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## CLUB NEWS

**Ludwin Fischer:** The FCCT has been informed of the sad passing on 25th October 2006 of member and friend Ludwin Wolfgang Fischer, a freelance journalist who worked with *InfoSud* and *Gavroche*. He was a resident of Mae Sot on the Thai-Burmese border and in addition to his journalistic work he was a basic English and computer skills teacher to the local Burmese kids there. Further information on Ludwin can be found at: [www.ludwin.net](http://www.ludwin.net).

### Books of Philip Jones Griffiths still available:

Philip Jones Griffiths is one of the pre-eminent photojournalists of the 20th century. In November, the FCCT was pleased to present Mr. Griffiths at the Club for a discussion of his work. Two of his books are available for purchase at the FCCT office.

*Agent Orange: Collateral Damage in Vietnam* (1,850 Baht), a bracing series of photographs documenting the suffering caused by U.S. deforestation efforts in the Vietnam War. *Vietnam at Peace* (3,000 Baht), a monumental chronicle of Vietnam's struggle to emerge from the apocalyptic destruction of war. Featuring 300 black and white images, Vietnam at Peace captures not only the country's shattered terrain, but also the destruction of its citizens' culture, minds, hearts, and hopes.

## SOI WHISPERS

The much-anticipated dinner with Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont on November 7 went off without a hitch—for the most part. Microphones didn't work, and the wine was wretched, but otherwise, the event lived up to its billing, with some lively commentary from the Prime Minister and plenty of tough questions from the floor. To make sure nothing got out of hand, local authorities set up a metal detector outside the ballroom at the Hyatt. The first potential terrorist turned out to be an extremely suspicious-looking Julian Spindler, who had to turn out the contents of all his pockets onto a table (nothing too embarrassing spilled out!). According to observers on hand at the event, he was frisked far more vigorously than was really necessary before being deemed an unlikely threat. During all this, of course, all kinds of other people were simply walking round the detector frame unchallenged.

A good B.S. detector might have helped one strange night in October, when counter-terrorism specialist and author Mike Tucker addressed a large audience at the Club. He lost his temper during a tough Q&A session, telling one questioner to "Shut the P\*\*\* up." Later, he threw a drink at an FCCT member and had to be forcibly restrained. He then shouted "This is f\*\*\*ing bullsh\*t" and stormed out, never to be seen again. The story has a strange coda. More than a month later, FCCT board member Patrick Barta received a surprise email from a writer who knew Mr. Tucker in Iraq and described him in unflattering terms in a book he wrote. According to the writer, Mr. Tucker recently posed as Patrick Barta and invited him to speak at then FCCT. After he accepted, Mr. Tucker then "disinvited" him, saying he had read the man's book and felt it was unfair to Mike Tucker. If none of this seems to make sense, don't worry: It doesn't.

Who knew FCCT stalwart Jeanne Hallacy moonlighted as a singer? She belted out "Sweet 16" with the FCCT band one recent Friday night, electrifying the house. The Club is still waiting for an encore.



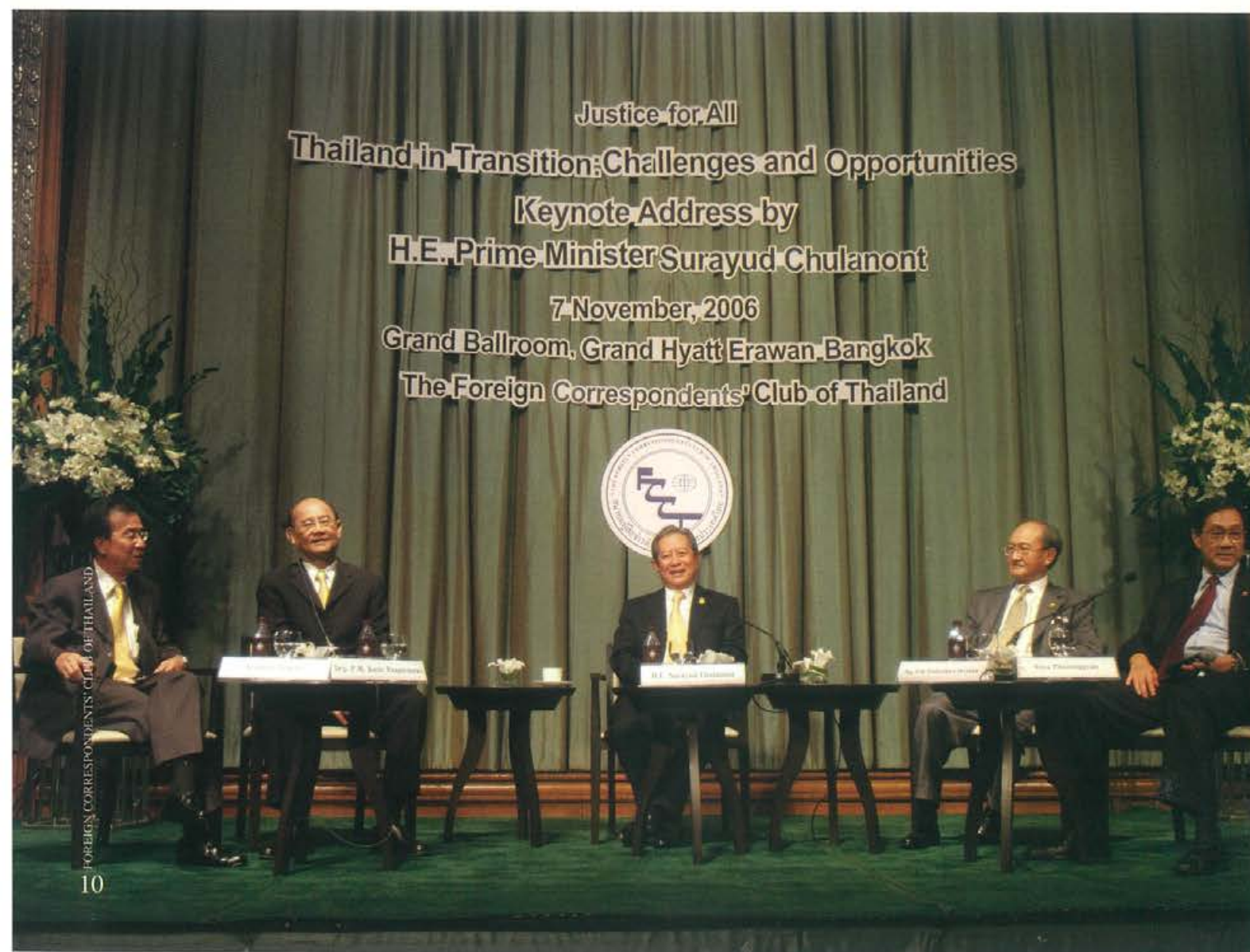


# Prime Minister Dinner

Thailand's new Prime Minister, Surayud Chulanont, graciously agreed to address the foreign press at the annual FCCT PM Dinner on Nov. 7. While admonishing reporters to remember their obligation to report accurately and fairly, he promised a more open government than the administration of his predecessor, Thaksin Shinawatra. Before the coup, he said, Thailand suffered from a "deformed" media environment, with TV stations "muzzled" and some news coverage "stage directed." The FCCT welcomes Mr. Surayud's promise to maintain an open dialogue with the foreign media and looks forward to a healthy and vigorous press in the year ahead.



Justice for All  
Thailand in Transition: Challenges and Opportunities  
Keynote Address by  
H.E. Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont  
7 November, 2006  
Grand Ballroom, Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok  
The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand







## Another Great Christmas

FCCT celebrated the Christmas holidays once again with an all-star cast of correspondents, diplomats and other local luminaries on December 15. After several years at the Sheraton Hotel, the FCCT decided to move this year's party back to the Clubhouse, where guests enjoyed an epic buffet of roast turkey (with all the trimmings) and mulled wine. Unfortunately, not many people drank the mulled wine, but there was plenty of beer and booze on hand to keep things interesting. Many thanks to everyone who attended – and our many sponsors, including Cathay Pacific and others. See you again next year!





# China's Impact on SE Asia

*China's economic and political rise is clearly transforming Southeast Asia. But is China a force for good or bad? In some places, including Thailand, low-cost Chinese factories are stealing business and attracting much of the foreign investment that used to come to Southeast Asia. They're also gobbling up much of the region's resources, adding to environmental strains in Burma, Indonesia, Thailand and elsewhere. Yet as all this occurs, China's rising consumer class is also creating a giant new source of export demand for some Southeast Asian businesses, creating exciting new opportunities for the entrepreneurs who are smart enough – and nimble enough – to take advantage. Sorting through the different impacts of China's rise isn't easy. But it's something that policymakers across the region – including Thailand – are going to have to deal with, says Milton Osborne, a visiting fellow at the Lowy Institute in Australia and a former Australian diplomat. He is the author of nine books on Southeast Asia, including "The Mekong: Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future". His commentary is excerpted from a new Lowy report entitled, "The Paramount Power: China and the Countries of Southeast Asia."*



Photo: Paula Bronstein

Over the past decade, China's relations with the countries of Southeast Asia have changed substantially, even dramatically. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fact that China now has close and productive dealings both with the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN), an organisation founded in 1967 in large part in opposition to China, and with the individual countries making up that organisation. Allowing for the considerable diversity that exists in its relations with each individual Southeast Asian country, China has now assumed a position as the paramount regional power. This paper seeks to describe how this came about and reflect on

contemporary Southeast Asian attitudes towards China, based in part on the writer's discussions in eight ASEAN capitals in November 2005.

Central to any discussion of China and Southeast Asia has been China's 'Peaceful Rise', a term coined by a senior party theoretician, Zheng Bijian, in 2003. The words reflect a Chinese concern to be seen as a country open to the world as its economy rapidly expands and as it seeks to develop mutually beneficial relations with other states. But well before the term as used, and following the accession to power of Deng Xiaoping, China had begun to turn its back on Mao's policy of supporting international revolutionary

activity. But while it withdrew its support for communist parties and insurgencies in Southeast Asia, there continued to be difficulties in its relations with the individual countries of that region. The most obvious of these difficulties involved China's hostile relations with Vietnam, but there was the more general problem of contested sovereignty in the South China Sea. And although Thailand had already developed close ties with China by the early 1980s, other Southeast Asian states, such as Singapore and Brunei, did not have diplomatic relations with Beijing until the early 1990s, while diplomatic relations between Indonesia and China were suspended until the same period.

The end of the Cold War provided an important impetus for China to begin improving its relations with Southeast Asia, but what appeared to be a real change in policies was brought into question by China's occupation of Mischief Reef in the Spratly Archipelago, in 1995. This Chinese action brought a sharp and critical response from the ASEAN countries, which was followed by what many analysts have seen as the starting point for what is now termed China's "charm offensive".

As China worked to overcome the negative results of its actions in the South China Sea, the onset of the Asian financial crisis gave it the opportunity to demonstrate its goodwill towards the Southeast Asian region. It provided a major loan to Thailand and participated in the raising of loan funds for Indonesia. Perhaps most importantly of all, it did not devalue the yuan, an action which would have placed even greater pressure on the currencies of the Southeast Asian states.

Several features of this charm offensive are now clearly apparent. China refrains from criticism of the internal policies of the countries of Southeast Asia, and in doing so gains benefit from being able to present itself as free from the colonial baggage of Western powers, including the United States. It has developed considerable effort to improving the character and quality of its diplomatic representatives in the region, and it has embarked, particularly since 1999, on a pattern of frequent visits by its leaders to the capitals of Southeast Asian states while welcoming reciprocal visits by the leaders of those states. Each visit is accompanied by the conclusion of an economic or financial agreement of some kind which, although in some cases relatively modest, greatly boosts China's standing.

Although relations of the kind just outlined have led to China's being seen in a new light in Southeast Asia, there was a short break in the development of mutual good feeling when, in 1998, China reinforced its position on Mischief Reef. A sharp Southeast Asian reaction, led by the Philippines, was followed by China's readiness to enter into discussions about issues associated with the South China Sea and, eventually, to the formulation of a 'Declaration of Conduct', in 2002, which may lead to joint development activity, without any claimants abandoning their claims of sovereignty.

China's economic development, once seen as a threat by Southeast Asians is now generally regarded as an opportunity, a fact reflected in what is already a substantial increase in trade between the region and China and has led to the conclusion of a framework agreement on free trade between ASEAN and

China in 2002, which will come into effect in 2010. One year later China agreed to sign ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Co-operation, a decision greeted with the greatest warmth in Southeast Asia.

Seen from the perspective of Southeast Asian countries, China's actions are both welcome and, for a number of them, a contrast with the policies of the United States. Although there is a recognition that the United States is unquestionably more powerful than any other state, in terms of its capacity to project power into the Southeast Asian region, some aspects of American policy are distinctly unpalatable to regional populations, particularly in those countries with Muslim majorities, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. The United States preoccupation with the 'war on terror' is also seen as diverting American attention away from Southeast Asia, while there is a reaction against Washington's belief 'that democracy is the best possible form of government, anytime anywhere', and its tendency to couch policies in terms of moral absolutes. There is little sympathy in Southeast Asia for any suggestion that the appropriate policy to follow in relation to China is that of 'containment', and affirmations by the United States that it does not have this policy are regarded with some scepticism.

While there are grounds for debating the degree to which Southeast Asian states are pursuing their interests through varying degrees of hedging in their dealing with China and the United States, there is no doubt that all countries of the region see their interests served through engagement with China. As expressed to me in various ways in my recent discussions in the region, China has become a power whose interests cannot be ignored. This is what is signified by the concept of paramouncy. And notably, confirming its paramount – rather than its egomaniac or dominating – position is the fact that Beijing has made clear that it accepts that other states have a right to exert influence in individual states. China's position in relation to Cambodia is a particularly striking example of this fact.

There seems little reason to suggest that Chinese influence in the countries of Southeast Asia has been exercised in a manner seriously contrary to Australian interests. That said, we should be aware that the countries of the region will increasingly frame their policies in ways that are in tune with Chinese policies. This could mean that there will be occasions when Australia may find that aspects of its foreign policy will not be supported in Southeast Asia. This has already been the case in terms of Australian support for Japan's gaining a seat on the United Nations Security Council. On the broader issue of regional security, there is little to suggest that increased Chinese influence in Southeast Asia works to Australia's detriment. In relation to terrorism, Chinese relations with Southeast Asia seem likely to be benign.

In the future we can assume that China will be resolute in pursuing what it sees as its own interests in Southeast Asia. Over the past decade it has shown that its policies reflect a wish to deal with a prosperous Southeast Asia. Whether Beijing fully appreciates all of the factors that ensure that prosperity may be open to question, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusions that increasingly that evidence suggests it does.



# On the Road to Mandalay...

China's expanding economic ties with Burma are helping prop up the country's oppressive junta, as *Newsweek's* Joe Cochrane and Melinda Liu recently found out.

For an isolated city in an isolated nation, the Burmese town of Mandalay has a peculiar international flavor these days. Bankrolled by Chinese money, new shopping centers and luxury private villas are springing up amid the city's charming colonial-era row houses and lazy, tree-lined boulevards. Traditional markets are jam-packed with everything from cheaply-made flashlights to baby clothes to pencils – all made in China and trucked south across the border. Local residents complain that the local military government is selling off prime land – and issuing Burmese passports – to mainland Chinese businessmen.

Recent Chinese construction projects include the newly finished Great Wall Hotel and two private Chinese-owned hospitals, which are reserved for mainland businessmen, Burmese army officers and other VIPs. The city's largest distributor of bottled drinking water is a Chinese company that set up shop only two years ago. A local tour guide pointed to an army signboard near the old Burmese royal palace during a recent visit; it read: "The military will never betray the national cause." He laughed and joked grimly, "There's nothing left anymore to betray. It's all been sold."

Halfway around the world, Chinese President Hu Jintao and U.S. President George Bush met recently at the White House to talk about urgent trade and geopolitical issues. One source of tension in the bilateral relationship is the U.S. administration's complaint that Beijing – in its zeal to secure supplies of oil, gas and other commodities – "is supporting resource-rich countries without regard to the misrule at home or misbehavior abroad of those regimes," as Washington's recently released national security strategy put it. Burma is a perfect example of what the U.S. Administration calls China's "mercantilist" foreign-policy strategy.

Beijing calls its international strategy one of "peaceful development". But its behavior seems to be perpetuating the misery of Burma's population by helping ensure that the country's brutal military junta remains in power. While promoting its own diplomatic and economic interests, Beijing has stuck to a policy of non-interference; that's made it best friends with the odious regime. That helps explain why Burma's generals have few problems stiffing the United Nations, surviving U.S. economic sanctions, refusing to release pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other activists, and continuing gross human rights abuses such as forced labor and rape by army soldiers. Burma, a country with massive natural resources and once a well-educated society, is now challenging North Korea as Asia's most notorious pariah state.

Nowhere is China's influence more evident than in

Mandalay, the country's second largest city and its cultural heart. The city's experiencing an unprecedented economic boom these days, but not one its residents are happy about. The influx of new business is coming at a price: mainland Chinese businessmen are taking over the city's economy and, claim some, its sovereignty by buying off the ruthless, corrupt military officials who run the country.

"China is trying to colonize Burma economically," says dissident Zin Linn, a senior member of the country's democratically elected government in exile. "In Mandalay, it's economic control, military control on the border and now political influence."

China is the only country with enough clout in Burma, also known as Myanmar, to help persuade the leadership to return to civilian rule, says Rizali Ismail, the former U.N. special envoy to Burma who quit the job after his repeated requests to visit the country were rejected. He describes the U.N. as "disappointed" with Beijing's reluctance to restrain the junta's bad behavior. Instead, China has concentrated on expanding business, political and military ties with the generals. The generals may not be rocket scientists, but they do know how to structure their economy to enrich themselves and their cronies. Without the expanding China trade, the woeful economy would likely collapse.

Burmese timber, minerals and rubber are being shipped to waiting markets across the border in China's Yunnan province and beyond. In addition to lining the generals' pockets with trade, Beijing gives Burma loans and military hardware. Meanwhile, China exported nearly \$1 billion in goods to Burma in 2004, according to an Asian Development Bank report, making it one of the few Southeast Asian countries with which Beijing has a trade surplus. Chinese companies are the preferred bidders for large-scale infrastructure projects in Burma, ranging from roads to hydro-electric dams.

Militarily, Beijing may soon have the run of the place. Opposition activists, not to mention the U.S. and Indian governments, have long feared that the junta will give China's navy access to its ports in the Indian Ocean. Zin Linn, who runs the exiled National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma office in Bangkok, says that Chinese military advisors recently helped the Burmese navy install nearly 30 radar sites on Burma's off-shore islands, apparently to help monitor maritime traffic in the Indian Ocean, through which much of East Asia's energy supplies pass.

Analysts say China is propping Burma up economically to ensure security on its own borders. "China doesn't care about human rights in Burma as long as it's stable," says Aung

Zaw, the editor of *Irrawaddy* magazine, which covers Burma from Thailand. "China can exploit it at its own leisure."

International condemnation of the Burmese military goes back to the late 1980s, when the army brutally crushed a student-led democracy uprising, killing hundreds in the former capital Rangoon. The generals relented to international pressure by holding national elections in 1990. When Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, or NLD, won in a landslide, the junta ignored the results and jailed hundreds of her supporters. Suu Kyi – an icon of democracy and a Nobel Laureate, dubbed simply "The Lady" by her countrymen -- has spent around 10 of the last 15 years under house arrest.

Increasingly, Burma's junta is an embarrassment for its neighbors and their economic grouping, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. In 2003, the Bush administration slapped new economic sanctions on Burma, but ASEAN and Rangoon's other trading partners, most notably China and India, declined to follow suit. The U.S. and ASEAN have since been at odds over whether sanctions or dialogue were more effective. Amid continuing pressure from the West, the junta announced a "roadmap to democracy" in September 2003 that would include a national reconciliation convention to draft a new constitution and eventually new elections. But the roadmap's sponsor, Prime Minister Gen. Khin Nyunt, was purged and jailed a year later following an internal power struggle with junta supremo General Than Shwe. Than Shwe has all but cut off diplomatic contact with the U.N. and the so-called "roadmap" has been roundly dismissed as a sham – except by China.

More and more, Chinese inroads into Burma seem to be adding to residents' headaches. The construction of a road from Mandalay to the Chinese border in the late 1990's brought the China trade home to the city. In the western suburb of Bujo, a developer built a subdivision of luxury villas five years ago to cater to the influx of Chinese. Today, every house is sold, complete with satellite TV dishes and surrounded by 10 foot fences with barbed wire to keep out intruders.

Less than two miles away, a group of teenage Burmese boys wash their clothes in a stream riddled with garbage and debris. The nearby bamboo shacks where local Burmese live

have no running water. One prominent local community leader says lower class Burmese families were forced to the edge of Mandalay by growing Chinese business and property developments closer to the center. "The running joke is that at least we have them surrounded," he said, laughing. Then his expression grew serious. "Our people have suffered so much. Why is this happening? Why?"

Beijing's non-interventionist approach to Burma stands in stark contrast to the vocal criticism leveled at Burma by the U.S. and Europe. President Bush made a trip to Asia and publicly raised the problem of Burma while visiting China and Japan. The U.S. administration, which has labeled Rangoon an "outpost of tyranny," has also pushed to have Burma formally put on the U.N. Security Council agenda, which analysts say would force China to decide whether to block such a move and square off against the U.N. and the West.

"((China)) would have to defend a rogue state," says Australian Janelle Saffin, a legal commentator and analyst on Burmese affairs. "For someone who is and sees themselves as an emerging superpower, it can't be in their interests to be seen to be deeply supporting rogue states."

The West is increasingly prodding ASEAN nations, as well as China and India, to bring the junta back to the bargaining table – before it's too late. "There needs to be reform, there needs to be a way to bring all the Burmese into some sort of national reconciliation," Shari Villarosa, charge d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon, says. "You need to release political prisoners. That's the only way to get out of the downward spiral the country's on."

Beijing can't be overly pleased that its main point of contact with the secretive regime, Khin Nyunt, was purged. Even more worrying for China, analysts say, is that Khin Nyunt's fall – as well as that of dozens of his military subordinates and family members – has bitterly divided the army. Meanwhile the population is increasingly frustrated with skyrocketing prices of staple goods and the perception of a hopeless future. "The junta is not stable at all," says Thai political analyst Chayachoke Chulasiriwongs. "If Than Shwe gets sick ... there might be some sudden, violent changes there." If that happens, Beijing will receive a crash course in the perils of empire.



Photo: Patrick Barra





# Train to Tibet

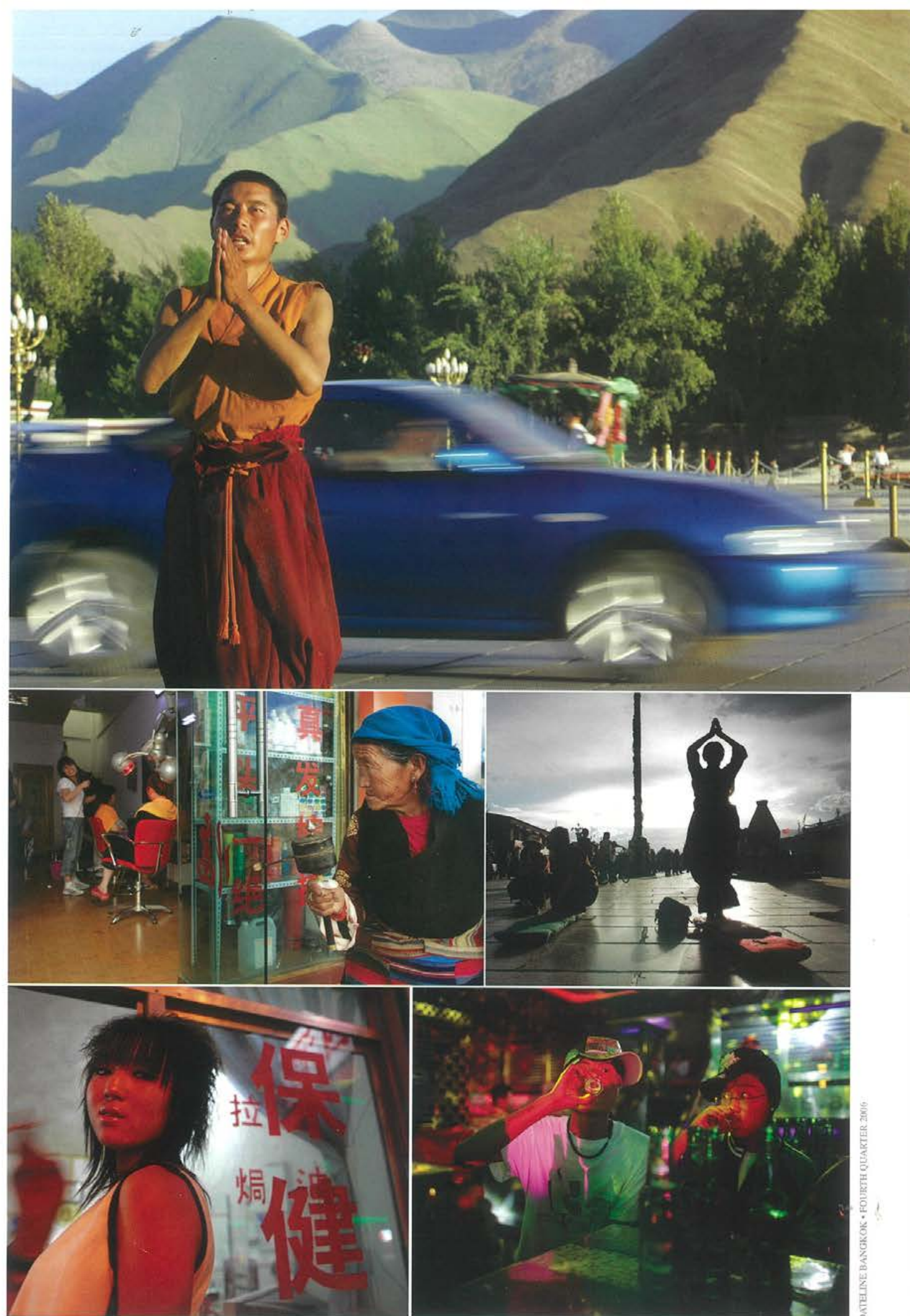
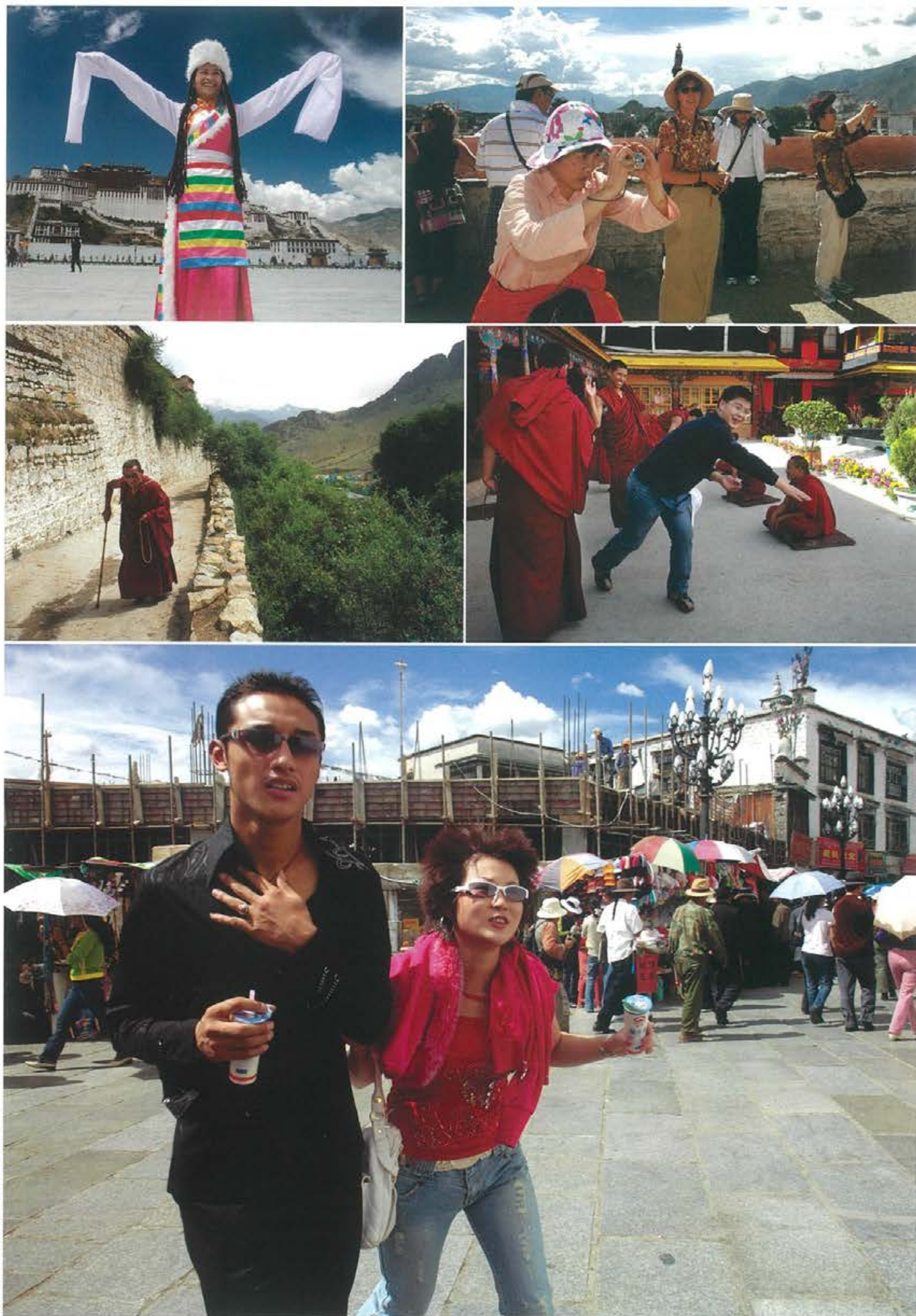
*A new train from China to Tibet is bringing more tourists – and big changes – to one of Asia's most remote places, as China aims to extend its influence. Getty photographer Paula Bronstein reports.*



*For the Chinese, the new, \$4 billion train symbolizes the country's growing economic and technological power. The train is a huge success with China's increasingly mobile middle class. Families queue up in huge numbers for their tickets and then sleep, eat and drink together during the long ride as they pass some of the world's most scenic landscapes. Chinese police provide a constant watchful presence throughout. But for the Tibetans, the train represents the steady encroachment of Chinese culture as it rapidly erodes Tibetan identity. Each day, the train brings an extra 3,000 people into the once-sleepy capitol of Lhasa. Rickshaw drivers pass by construction sites for new hotels while strange new imports – like hair salons, discos, SUVs and sex workers – begin to appear across the city. At times, the tourists mix poorly with the monks and other Tibetans who are trying to go about their daily lives. Increasingly, Tibetan culture is commoditized through the sale of trinkets and Tibetan "costumes," which the tourists dutifully wear as they pose for photos in front of the great Potala Palace (which itself is undergoing a \$60 million makeover).*









# My Jogging World

*Associated Press bureau chief – and Bangkok legend – Denis Gray has jogged through hellholes, Edens and everything in between during his years as a roving reporter. Have you exercised today?*



It seemed like they'd never encountered a jogger, but the folks couldn't have been friendlier, waving, joking, practicing their few words of English, as I ran through the shabby frontier town of Anlong Veng, Cambodia, which had sheltered one of the biggest collections of mass killers in modern times.

Anlong Veng, in the sticks of northwest Cambodia, ranks high on the surreal scale among the many places on four continents where I've laced up my running shoes. But then there was one of Saddam Hussein's pleasure palaces in Baghdad; Rwanda just after the tribal

massacres; the cow-dung strewn stadium ringed by 100,000 refugees in northern Albania...

At Anlong Veng, I jogged by a primary school, chirping with happy kids about to head home. It was built by Ta Mok, a local hero, buried a week earlier, known to the outside world as "The Butcher" for the atrocities he committed as a Khmer Rouge commander.

In the near-distance, under a threatening monsoon sky, rose the Dangrek Mountains, a thickly jungled range where the dying Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot and his top lieutenants hid out as their murderous movement reeled toward apocalypse in the late 1980s.

"Where you go?" hailed smiling roadside vendors. Two boys on a motorcycle pulled up next to me for some English conversation practice on the run. Another pair nearly crashed their motorcycle as they both turned back to stare with bewildered amusement.

Anlong Veng is no. 122 on my log of locations – exhilarating, splendid, sometimes risky – where I've tried to keep reasonably fit while on the road reporting for The Associated Press or on my own vacation time.

The first entry dates back to 1984 as some of Southeast Asia's better unspecified but plentiful temptations started to get the best of me – and

about some of those temptations, crafted leads to stories and kept meticulous records of best times and longest distances run. I practiced a kind of Buddhist meditation, focusing solely on one movement, like every other footfall of my right leg, to block out the ennui and aches.

Gradually, I found myself being won over, then converted, finally addicted and was soon packing my jogging gear to just about any destination. An internal alarm clock also traveled along.

So when, for example, a late afternoon salvo of Bulgarian rockets hit Camp Warhorse, where I was embedded with U.S. forces, I grew fidgety



my waistline. That's when photojournalist John Everingham, a close friend who wrestled pythons as a youngster in the Australian Outback, uttered words for which I will forever be grateful: "You better get back into shape. And there's only one efficient way to do it in the free time you and I have – jog."

Pounding out mile after boring mile had always seemed about as much fun as figuring out logarithm tables. Track had been my worst sport in school by far.

So when I embarked on my road to rehabilitation, I tried to sweeten the ordeal or set my mind on automatic pilot. I fantasized

and extremely upset with the Iraqi insurgents who had aborted my planned jog.

Probably my most ego-boosting one came in Iraq, at a nasty city called Najaf where I was hunkered down inside a smelly, high-walled, machine-gun nested compound with troops of the elite 82nd Airborne Division. They averaged a third my age.

"Not bad – for a reporter," one of them called out, watching me shuffle through a carpet of desert sand. He and his buddies were huddled in the shade, lazily drinking Coke, cleaning their M-16s and grumbling about the gagging heat.

Whatever the obvious dangers of war zone



jogging, I found over the years that dogs and golf have proved to be more consistently hazardous.

The rabies-infected canines that roam in many Asian parts are definitely not a jogger's best friend. Some will bark, bare teeth and occasionally charge a runner so I arm myself with a stone or two when mangy mutts are expected along my route (one friend, twice bitten by the same neighborhood dog in Bangkok, finally terminated it with extreme prejudice).

I don't really blame the dogs, suddenly confronted with a towering stranger emitting, to them, exotic and undoubtedly foul odors. Or for that matter the toddlers in remote villages who have run screaming into their mothers' arms as my pale-skinned body lumbered near (some, as I have come to learn, believe they are seeing a ghost).

Golf balls are the main menace on my own, home jogging ground – the Royal Bangkok Sports Club, a marvelous, green oasis smack in the middle of the traffic-plagued urban jungle that Thailand's capital has become. Unfortunately for those who don't like the game – I hate it – the club encloses a nine-hole golf course through which the jogging track runs.

Use of the track dropped dramatically after it was reliably rumored that a jogger had been struck, losing half his family jewels to a hurtling golf ball.

Perhaps I've tended to highlight the Adrenalin-inducing hellholes. In truth, my jogging world has encompassed moments, nay countless hours, of sheer joy and beauty, the pace of a run, the visual and sensual all-surround

intensifying the experience of a tropical beach, a mountainscape or a park in Paris.

You don't get goose bumps speeding across the Sydney Harbor Bridge in a taxi but I did, enveloped by cool and briny breezes, glimpsing the white caps far below – as I celebrated the end of the 2000 Olympics with a jog across that icon of Australia.

What can match winding one's way into a quintessential English village on a summer evening, rabbits scampering across a path through an archway of greenery, the church graveyard where generations sleep, a thatched-roofed pub where I will soon feel less guilty about downing a pint or two of oak-aged ale.

I've also huffed and puffed into the past. In Zagreb, alphabetically last on my still expanding list of "Places Jogged," it's I who thought I'd seen a ghost while passing by a quarter frozen in time. It was my grandfather, dapper in a white linen suit, lounging in a fin de siècle sidewalk cafe of a city he would visit during the twilight of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Now, I'm on the homeward stretch in Anlong Veng, forced to peer into the well of memory, and out of it rise images of the executioners – some likely these very smiling citizens around me – and their shattered victims.

Among those were many friends, perhaps the bravest and most loyal ones I've ever known. We covered the Cambodian War together, before they perished at the orders of Anlong Veng's killers in the reign of terror that followed. In mid-stride, I raised my right hand to salute them all.



## Staying Fit on the Road:

1. Pack the essentials – Running shoes, socks, shorts and tops, plus sun cream and hat. Some climes can be brutal to the body.
2. Loner or joiner? – If you like company on your jogs, make some contacts before arrival, like the Hash House Harriers, with more than 1,700 chapters from Afghanistan to Yemen. Other jogging fraternities can be found on the Internet or guide books.
3. Are the natives friendly? – Normally they are. I drew the line at non-U.S. military guarded areas of Iraq and just about anywhere in Somalia. The mean streets of Johannesburg might also qualify.
4. Get the lay of the land: Best outdoor jogging areas are parks, school sports fields, stadiums which allow access, riverside promenades, beaches, country roads. Avoid city streets and highways. They're often polluted and populated by insane drivers.
5. No, well, almost no excuses: Travel can be a great excuse for wavering joggers. Pare these down to ones like severe diarrhea, a 24-hour interview with the country's president or a decidedly hostile environment. Otherwise hit the road.

# Rumors or Facts?

*For Bangkok-based journalists, New Year's Eve was supposed to be a night off. It wasn't. Freelance journalist and Asia Sentinel contributor Dan Ten Kate writes about what it was like trying to sort out fact from fiction in Thailand's increasingly murky political environment.*

When a big story breaks, confusion tends to follow. Rumors fly about left and right, and reporters must struggle to quickly sift through fact and fiction.

The New Year's Eve bombings were no different. Like most people in town, I was all set for a night of good eating and boozing. I just bought a new grill, and managed to arrange a spread of cheeseburgers, hot dogs, pork chops, baked beans, salad and cold beer for a few people.

Just as I started cooking, a friend at a local paper called up.

"We better not head to Silom tonight," he said. "Six bombs just went off in Bangkok, three killed."

I immediately turned away from the grill and flipped on the television. Within minutes, the local stations had footage of the blast sights.

Information was hard to come by. The number of bombs and casualties changed by the minute, and it was impossible to check things out first-hand. Even so, many journalists had already filed by the time 10pm or 11pm had rolled around, and follow up stories were planned for the morning when the dust had settled.

Back on my roof, I managed to finally cook myself a burger and grab a beer. At midnight, or a little before, fireworks lit up the skyline in five or six different places. For a brief moment, a sense of normalcy had returned.

When things quieted down, the shrill cry of ambulances could be heard. More phone calls. More television. Two more bombs at Central World. A foreigner's leg had been blown off?

I grabbed my bag and headed out with my friends for the bombsite. We walked past a slew of dazed foreigners. At Central World, journalists, photographers, cameramen and witnesses had gathered behind a police barricade in the middle of Rajdamri Road. About 40 to 50 policeman stood in groups as a forensics team photographed the scene and collected evidence.

Already speculation had begun. Was it southern insurgents? Thaksin's guys? Military renegades? The police? The coup group itself?

Reports quickly spread through the crowd. More bombs had gone off.

Tourist locations Suan Lum Night Bazaar and Buddy Bar on Khao San road had also been hit. Wow, I thought. This

could get really ugly. Five minutes later, new information: False alarm. The only bombs to explode at midnight went off 50 meters or so from where we stood.

I headed across the street to the police hospital with another journalist. In the lobby, we finally got some verifiable information on the victims. "Linga Fountain" is the American injured. Do they mean "Linda"?

Are the victims seriously injured? No, says the nurse. Anyone lose a leg? Nope. It was just a fracture.

Friends of victims, diplomats, and government ministers scurried through the closed doors of the emergency room. A small group of journalists and photographers peek in. A man in a green blazer steps out from an elevator, and the Thai press quickly surrounds him. He yields few details. Turns out he's the tourism minister.

The clock strikes 3 am. The doors swing open and a female patient is wheeled out to a waiting ambulance. She is being moved to Bumrungrad. Her husband doesn't speak English. The tourism minister is accompanying some Hungarian diplomats, looking extremely worried. He gently brushes off a question about the possible affect on tourism.

The next morning, the dust didn't settle. In fact, more than two weeks later information was just as sketchy as it was the night of December 31.

Government officials immediately fingered politicians who "lost power," but then said they had no evidence to prove it. The generals were bolder in their assertions.

The haze clouding the bombing investigation seems to seep into most other news out of Bangkok.

Capital controls are here one day and gone the next. Well, for equities, and maybe Thai-owned companies like PTT at least.

Foreign ownership laws are also tightened. How? What companies are on List Three? Does the law even define a nominee?

A coup is in the works to take out Surayud's government. Or was it just a "normal" troop movement around Bangkok?

Thaksin can no longer travel around the world. He's leading a group of "undercurrents"? What are those?

A Chiang Mai panda is apparently too fat to have sex. Can that happen to me one day?

By the time this is published, maybe some of these issues will have been cleared up. As for now, facts have a short shelf life.





# Remembrances of Haw Past

By Bangkok Chowhound

Asians don't bake. So while other kids got brownies tucked inside their lunch boxes, my brother and I had laopobing, a flaky, store-bought pastry with a vegetal heart of sweetened winter melon. Instead of banana bread, we got saqima – a sticky confection of deep-fried noodles, honey and sesame seeds that glued your mouth shut. For lengthy, inter-state car trips, we weren't bribed into sugar-induced obedience with chocolate chip cookies, but with rolls of Haw Flakes.

When you're a kid, small for your age, and your parents have complete control over your diet, you learn to make do. So I developed a fondness for Haw Flakes – thin rose-colored discs stacked one on top of the other and packaged in inch-tall cylinders. They tasted like tart, sour apples with a numbing coating of sugar, smelled like musty library books and had the consistency of chalk. And they were a lot more appealing than the other snack options of dried squid, watermelon seeds and White Rabbit candy.

More importantly, Haw Flakes held the promise of a trip, perhaps to a beach or a state park. Haw Flakes meant the start of vacation, marathon games of "War" well past bedtime, battered fried clams in red plastic baskets lined with white paper and corn-on-the-cob, and Dad relaxing with a beer in hand.

Between the ages of 1-14, I probably devoured thousands of Haw Flakes without ever knowing exactly what they were. The list of ingredients wasn't exactly illuminating: haw and sugar. Every time I asked my parents what haw was, they would say, "Why it's shanza," and then tell me not to eat too many Haw Flakes or my molars would rot and I'd have to get fitted with dentures. Eventually, being a devotee of a hillbilly variety show of the late seventies, "Hee-Haw," I figured

haw had something to do with horses. I naturally concluded that I was eating ground bits of horse, compressed into discs the width and size of an American quarter. Somehow, this didn't slow my consumption of Haw Flakes.

After the age of 14, I began vetoing family vacations involving epic car rides and as an unintended result, Haw Flakes faded from my diet, along with other once favored snacks with dubious translations like pork floss and grass jelly. In fact, I hadn't really thought much about Haw Flakes until recently, when I encountered at a Beijing teahouse a gourmet, adult version of these forgotten childhood treats – a sort of Haw Flake fruit roll-up. Spotting the characters for shanza, I gingerly picked one out of the candy dish the waitress had carefully placed at our table. Watching me gobble one after the other with mild amusement, my companion repeatedly asked me what exactly they were made of. "Haw!" I'd cheerfully proclaim before popping another into my mouth.

Since then, I've learned that haw is short for the hawthorn berry, which is reputedly good for heart conditions, and that Shandong province is the biggest producer of Haw Flakes.

I've also discovered that Haw Flakes are the madeleines for a generation of 30-something Asian-Americans. The sight of the distinctive red, yellow and green packaging brings back the queasiness of long-distance car journeys, our family's gas-guzzling blue Buick station wagon, and painful rounds of Punch Buggy. After spotting pictures of the Haw Flakes on my blog, a Korean-American friend immediately wrote back, recalling how they were the post-orchestra practice treat for her and the other Asian-American kid in town press-ganged into playing classical

violin. Google "Haw Flakes" and you'll discover a network of Asian-Americans united in their nostalgia over these crunchy discs.

So it's with dismay that I've noticed a tendency with some friends of refusing their princesses and prince-lings any sweets. Granted, one dear and valiant friend has been trying to force feed his child scones, apple crumble, anything. "For Chrissakes, it's chocolate," he muttered in disbelief after his son turned his nose up to a sip of hot cocoa. But more common is another friend who once asked me not to give her baby a napkin with a tiny, thin smear of chocolate lest it touch his lips. I'm holding off on refined sugar, she said. He's so pure.

The problem with that logic is that babies shit, pee, manipulate and have off days like the rest of us, denting their "pure" credentials. And when he's five and gets his first taste of chocolate at a friend's house, he's going to feel mighty irate that you've been denying him one of nature's great gastronomic gifts to man.

Finally, an organic, five-grain biscuit will never ever unleash a torrent of memories, except of schoolyard taunts and deprivation. Tootsie Rolls, Jolly Ranchers, Sugar Daddies, Atomic Fireballs, Sweetarts and Nerds each carry their own specific set of reminiscences. Or if you're British, perhaps the sight of a Cadbury Flake's or Liquorice Allsorts brings back the memory of summer holidays, scraped knees and the linoleum of your parents' kitchen before they remodeled and sold the house, and moved to southern Spain.

So go on, buy that packet of Sour Patch Kids and let the memories roll in. Oh, and if there's a child in the vicinity, don't forget to share.



## Best Places to Buy Nostalgic Candy in Bangkok

Yaowarat is probably your best bet for Haw Flakes and other Sino-tinged candy. Meanwhile, those hankering for gummy bears, sherberts, humbugs and other retro candy, check out the Central Market in Central Chidlom and any Marks and Spencer outlet. The kiddie floor in the Emporium Department Store has a fascinating collection of Japanese goodies.



- **A publishing house**  
We are specialized in writing, editing, managing and printing magazines and yearbooks for foreign chambers of commerce, international associations and local organizations in Thailand.
- **A printing house**  
We serve companies in Thailand with commercial printing of brochures, folders, booklets, flyers as well as letterheads, envelopes and business cards.
- **A website partner**  
We create and maintain websites to constantly increase the presence on the internet of the organizations and companies in Thailand we serve.





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