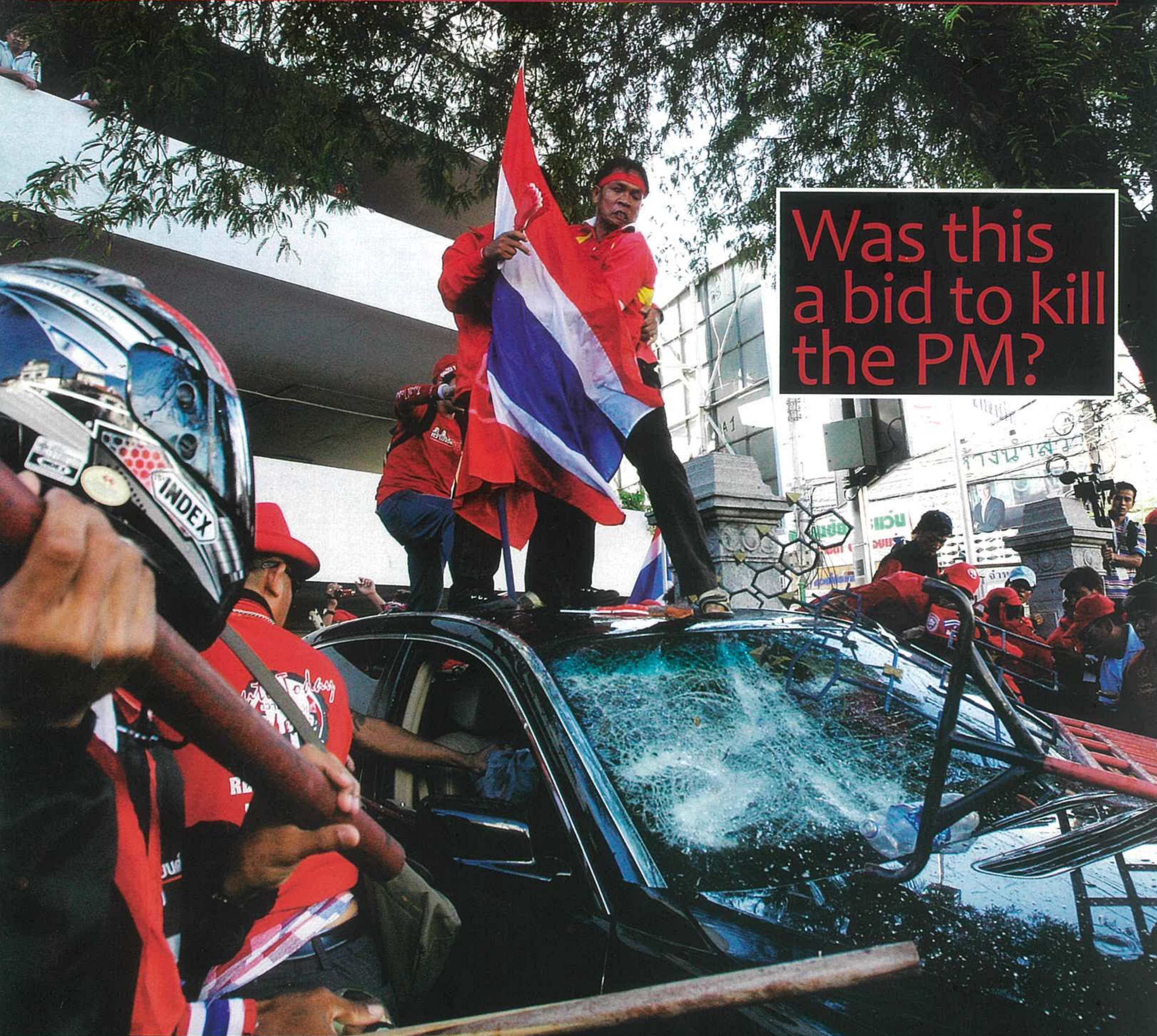


DATELINE BANGKOK

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF THAILAND MAGAZINE

FIRST QUARTER 2009



Was this
a bid to kill
the PM?

SONGKRAN RIOT:
Jonathan Head looks back
Bangkok burning

REFUGEE CRISES:
Pushbacks exposed
Nong Khai refugees



For further information call NIST on 02-651-2065, visit our website at www.nist.ac.th or send an email to admissions@nist.ac.th



NEW INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THAILAND

A Truly International School Education in the Heart of Bangkok

Since its inception over 15 years ago, NIST has gained a reputation as one of the best International Baccalaureate schools in the world offering all three IB programmes – the Primary Years, the Middle Years and the IB Diploma programmes.

As an IB World School accredited by CIS and the NEASC, NIST provides an international education to a culturally diverse group of students from over 50 nationalities ranging in age from 3 to 18 years. It has a well-resourced campus with state-of-the-art facilities located in the heart of Bangkok's primary business, diplomatic, residential and shopping areas.

NIST's mission is to inspire and empower each student to pursue individual excellence and to enrich the world.

Accredited By



We understand

Your long-term health is our continuing commitment. The **BNH Internal Medicine Clinic** GPs (General Practitioners) start each consultation by listening to you and understanding where the real problem lies. Through such preventative care comes life-long health. From paediatrics to senior health care and even just a friendly chat, you receive the best of care.

Choose Health. Choose BNH.

BNH HOSPITAL (Sathorn - Convent)
9/1 Convent Rd., Silom, Bangkok 10500 Tel. 02-686-2700 Fax. 02-632-0578-9
www.BNHhospital.com E-mail: info@BNHhospital.com



Real healthcare starts with listening

BNH Internal Medicine Clinic



HARROW INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL BANGKOK



Offers a British education up to pre-university level within a safe and secure campus
A broad programme of sports and other activities
Modern, purpose-built boarding houses providing a supportive, structured environment.
Excellent student progress to the world's leading universities, including Oxford & Cambridge

For more information please contact : The Admissions Office
Email: admissions@harrowschool.ac.th
Tel: +66 (0) 2503 7222 ext 1127, 1129
Visit our website: www.harrowschool.ac.th



HARROW





The Regent's Schools Thailand are delighted to announce the establishment of

The Regent's School UK

at Riddlesworth Hall School, Diss, Norfolk, UK through equity participation in Riddlesworth Hall Ltd.

Applications for the UK campus are being accepted for boys and girls up to Year 8 for September 2009 admission.

For further details please visit <www.regents-school-uk.com>, call 02-690-3777 ext 100 or 222 or email: <enquiries@regents-school-uk.com>

your partner in print
SCANDMEDIA



We have helped foreign companies and organizations with all sorts of graphic jobs in Thailand since 1994. In the process we have become friends with some of the nicest people in this part of the world. Building trusting relationships with the people we work with is the only way we want to work in this business. Even it sometimes takes new clients by surprise. Chances are that you will like it.

Our account executives are champions in finding creative ways to maximize your outcome and make you look good. Sometimes, even a small change to the way you at first envisioned your printing job will make a big difference on the bottom line or maybe add new functionality to the job.

BROCHURE
FLYER
FOLDER
MAGAZINE
LEAFLET
BOOK
STATIONARY

Think of ScandMedia as the closest you can get to having an inhouse graphic department - without actually having one.

ScandMedia - your partner in print.

www.scandmedia.com Call 0 2943 7166-8

THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF THAILAND
Penthouse, Maneeeya Centre Building
518/5 Ploenchit Rd., Phatumwan, Bangkok 10330
Tel: 652-0580-1 Fax: 652-0582
Email: fccthai@loxinfo.co.th
Website: www.fccthai.com

PRESIDENT

Marwaan Macan-Markar
Inter Press Service (IPS)
Email: marwaan@ips.org

PAST PRESIDENT

Nirmal Ghosh
The Straits Times
Email: karmanomad@gmail.com

FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

Jonathan Head
BBC
Email: jonathan.head@bbc.co.uk

SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT

Patrick Barta
The Wall Street Journal
Email: patrick.barta@wsj.com

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Gregory Lowe
Bangkok Post
Email: greg.lowe@fccthai.com

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Dan Ten Kate
Bloomberg News
Email: dantenkate@gmail.com

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Anasuya Sanyal
Channel News Asia
Email: anasuyasan@gmail.com

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Justin Moseley
Consortium UK
Email: justin@consortiumuk.net

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Karuna Buakamsri
TV Channel 3
Email: kbuakamsri@yahoo.co.uk

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Stuart Raj
Kogneit (Thailand) Ltd.
Email: stujay@kogneit.com

TREASURER

Dominic Faulder
Email: dominic@mozart.inet.co.th

RECORDING SECRETARY

Henry J Silverman
Global Spectrum
Email: henry.silverman@fccthai.com

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY

Jim Pollard
The Nation
Email: jimpollard_1999@yahoo.com

DATELINE BANGKOK

Editor: Jim Pollard
Deputy Editor: Greg Lowe
Design & Layout: Phaisan Naengnoi
Advertisements: Finn Balslev

Marketing & Production

Scand-Media Corp., Ltd.
4142 M. 3 Thanyakarn Village
Ramintra Soi 14 Ramintra Rd., Bangkok 10230
Tel: 02-943-7166-8 Fax: 02-943-7169
Email: scandmedia@scandmedia.com

The opinions expressed by writers in Dateline Bangkok do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand or the editors.

Contents

First Quarter 2009

PRESIDENT'S DESK

- 6 A Different Way of Seeing

CLUBBING

- 7 • Great Night at the Club...
26 • Soi Whispers (*Remember, you read it here first*)...



SONGKRAN RIOT

- 8 Looking Back in Wonder
12 Riots Photo Essay
14 Bangkok Burning

REFUGEE CRISES

- 18 Pushbacks Exposed
22 Nong Khai Refugees:
A Key Test For Thailand

BURMA REPORTING

- 24 Writing Behind Bars

On the cover: Red shirts attack the PM's car at the Interior Ministry on April 12; spokesmen later claimed this was an attempt on Abhisit's life. Photo by Athit Perawongmetha/Getty.

Take a front line seat at world events and be part of the buzz in the region by joining the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand.

Found at the heart of Asia's news and providing a hub of conviviality and professional commitment, the FCCT is a must for anyone wanting to engage in our times.

Frequent programme nights reveal and explain current affairs. Meet friends, colleagues and leading figures from the region's business, government, diplomatic and media circles at the bar. Press conferences, film nights and international receptions all happen here.

Members have special privileges: exclusive Internet access; this unique quarterly magazine for free; a weekly bulletin detailing upcoming events; insight into path-breaking photography and art, Jazz on Friday nights, special gourmet nights, and more. For street cred and sustenance in these trying times, the FCCT is the only choice.

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 Jim Pollard (jimpollard_1999@yahoo.com) or deputy editor Greg Lowe (greg.lowe@fccthai.com). Submissions are paid for with glory and bar coupons.

Change lot of doctors
Takes Antihistamine all the time
Never ending sickness
Been to the doctor countless time



"At TRIA, the root causes of my allergies were finally disentangled."

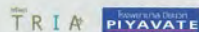
At TRIA, your allergy problems are systematically analyzed and attended at the underlying cause by our capable team of specialists. Individualized programs are designed with an integrative medical approach, based on your personal test results using the latest functional medicine technologies.

Hidden Food Allergy Test Cash Voucher

Now until September 09 **3,760** Baht

* Bring this coupon to get discount for food allergy 30 antigens

Tel. 02-660-2602

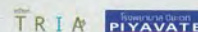


Hidden Food Allergy Test Cash Voucher

Now until September 09 **5,100** Baht

* Bring this coupon to get discount for food allergy 96 antigens

Tel. 02-660-2602





A Different Way of Seeing

By MARWAAN MACAN-MARKAR

The usefulness of an in-house magazine can always be gauged by how long it has been around. I am familiar with a few that were brought out with much excitement only to end up having a short life. Others continue in fits and starts, having a good run one year and then barely surfacing the next. Reasons for such failure vary. One that I have often heard is a lack of enthusiasm; another, a lack of material.

Fortunately, we have had few such troubles with the FCCT's in-house journal, Dateline. And no better proof lends strength to this view than the following fact: this year marks 25 years since the magazine of Southeast Asia's oldest and largest foreign correspondents' club came out. And since that initial volume, in April 1984, editorial teams have changed hands and soldiered on to offer a publication that, I dare say, has been well received by those who have been members over the past two-and-a-half decades.

The editions that have come out have largely attempted to serve two functions. One offers a slice of life about the goings on within the foreign correspondents' community and the happenings at the club. Soi Whispers is typical of this diet. It is a mix of humour and has an informal air about it. Where else can you learn about a correspondent being fingered by the Thai police for having the looks of a suspect they had just arrested for an internationally-known murder case?

But there is also the substantial side of this magazine. One only has to glimpse at the covers of past editions displayed above the bar to get a feel for what this journal has tackled. The political chaos in Cambodia, the crackdowns in Burma and Thailand's habit of coups as a solution for its troubles have been photographed and written about extensively. It is material that you would hardly come across in the publications found in news-stands and bookshops that dot Bangkok and other capitals in the neighbourhood.

And what sets such material apart is reflected in the current edition, too,



where correspondents, freelancers and photographers based in Thailand share personal accounts of events they covered. If anything, these pieces help those who were not on the frontlines to gain a better and deeper understanding of a particular moment of history that made the headlines. Such narratives, I think, also reveal something more: that there are different ways of seeing, feeling and interpreting the events unfolding in our midst.

The BBC's Jonathan Head, who will be leaving Southeast Asia after a long stint, offers his own reading of the April clashes between the Red Shirts and the Thai army. He compares it with another confrontation he covered between anti-government protesters and the military years before, in Indonesia. And Nick Nostitz, a freelance photographer, narrates what comes close to an eyewitness account of that Songkran showdown.

Elsewhere, Jim Pollard, the editor of Dateline, brings to our attention the work of Alan Morrison. It was the latter's stories through his own website, Phuketwan.com, that, at first, exposed the Thai military's treatment of the Rohingyas escaping oppression in Burma. Morrison's scoop, early

this year, helped to confirm the importance of the small, largely unsung media outlets to expose major scandals. Who says investigative journalism is the province of the big media?

But in Burma, as we know, such a passion comes with the risk of a prison term. This is illustrated in a piece by Phil Thornton. "It is impossible to write the truth. We censor our own work. Everything is screened," says a senior journalist for a magazine in this account.

Not everything that appears within these pages will find ready acceptance. After all, some of the issues just mentioned did not go down well with sections of Thailand's political establishment. Some correspondents were accused of being unduly biased in their reportage, while others (on the Rohingya coverage) were fingered as being part of a foreign conspiracy aimed to tarnish the country's image. The whole thing took me back to my war-torn country, Sri Lanka, where the government and its cheerleaders have made a cottage industry of covering up political sins. Enterprising journalists – local and foreign – are invariably condemned.

Yet the provocative nature of some pieces here is in keeping with what we at the FCCT strive to achieve in that other area of activity the club is known for – a space for free and open discussion of ideas and views through regular panel discussion. That we have got into trouble for such openness is well known. Some in the Thai media have found us fair game, subjecting us to shrill commentary. The Crime Suppression Division (which continues to summon some of us) has its own view of the club, of course. So, too, the gentleman from Special Branch, who drift in with the air of a regular when we host Burma events.

I suppose such a cocktail of controversies is what has helped earn the FCCT a special place in Thailand's political and social landscape. And Dateline's long innings – to use a cricketing argot – has provided an ideal window. ■



Tales from a top hotelier

Kurt Wachtveitl tells some anecdotes from his 42 years in charge of the "best hotel in the world", the Oriental, which was the FCCT's founding location. A club member for many years, Kurt is seen here with AP bureau chief and club life member Denis Gray; with club staff (Roong & Santana), centre; plus British Correspondent James Pringle, right.



All the big issues

The use of torture, political prisoners in Burma, assessing relief operations after Cyclone Nargis, the International Criminal Court, harm reduction among injecting drug users and more. These were among the many topics discussed by visiting dignitaries, government officials and a host of panellists from various groups at the club in recent months.



Big crowd for Jesse

American civil rights activist and political leader Jesse Jackson drew a large gathering for a talk he gave on "Building a Culture of Peace and Development in a Globalised World" in late April. Rev Jackson's visit was part of the International Peace Foundation's "Bridges" series.

OUR SINCERE THANKS



The FCCT gratefully acknowledges the generosity of our sponsors whose contributions to the Club's programs and activities have ensured we remain Bangkok's premier public forum. Please support our sponsors when you can, as they support us!

- Bangkok Post
- Coca-Cola (Thailand) Limited and ThaiNamthip Ltd., bottler of the Company's products, including Coca-Cola, Coke Zero, Sprite, Sprite Zero, Fanta, Namthip and Minute Maid Splash
- Nation Multimedia Group
- NewspaperDirect
- Pfizer Global Pharmaceuticals and Pfizer (Thailand) Ltd.
- Star Alliance
- Maneeya Realty, our long-suffering and ever-supportive landlord



PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY



AHMAD PERMONGMETHA/GETTY



PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY

Looking Back in Wonder

THE BBC'S SOUTHEAST ASIA CORRESPONDENT JONATHAN HEAD LOOKS BACK AT MORE THAN A DECADE IN INDONESIA AND THAILAND AND COMPARES THE RECENT RIOTS IN BANGKOK AND PATTAYA WITH THOSE HE WITNESSED IN JAKARTA SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING IN ASIA

I arrived in Jakarta for my first posting as a foreign correspondent in January 1996. The taxi dropped me, sweating under the mountain of bags I had brought with me, outside the small house in Pejompongan that my predecessor had lived in. She was nowhere to be seen – she had gone for a last tour of Indonesia's more remote islands.

As I dumped my bags on the floor and tried to get my bearings, the phone went. It was a duty editor in the BBC World Service newsroom in London. "Hello Jonathan", the cheery voice on the other end of the line said, "there seems to be a large ship that's gone down somewhere near you – can you file some copy for the next hour?" Help, I thought. Who do I call for information? How can I get anything confirmed?

I chickened out, pleading jet-lag, and the sheer culture-shock at finding myself working on my own in Jakarta.

Over the following thirteen and a half years I have learned that there is in fact very little reliable information to be had in this part of the world – that getting something confirmed one day, even by a senior government source, doesn't mean it won't turn out to be completely false the next day.

In many ways I was very lucky in the timing of my arrival in Indonesia. It was a quiet news patch back then. After three decades in power, President Suharto showed no signs of relaxing his tight grip on the country. Like the rest of the region, the Indonesian economy was expanding at a

brisk pace, helped by plentiful infusions of short-term foreign investment. People talked quietly about the huge uncertainties that hung over the succession, but it didn't seem an urgent issue.

So I had plenty of time to hone my skills as a reporter, and make my mistakes outside the pressure-cooker atmosphere of a breaking story. And I just fell in love with Indonesia, a country that will forever have a special place in my heart.

Two and a half years later, I was running around the by now very familiar streets of Jakarta surrounded by the most astonishing anarchy. People were just pouring out of side streets, high on a sudden sense of freedom, and attacking any symbols of wealth and privilege they could find. Shopping malls were broken into and comprehensively looted, Jakarta's underclass staggering away with whatever booty they could carry. Cars were being torched, giant television sets smashed, then the malls themselves, and banks and government offices, set ablaze.

And for the most part Indonesia's military, the feared institution credited with holding the fractious archipelago together for so long, simply stood by and watched Suharto's authority crumble. I watched the police, a despised entity back then, race around, making fitful efforts to contain the outbreaks, occasionally shooting wildly – but no-one feared them any more. Jakarta burned for two days, until the military decided to re-impose order once more. A week later, Suharto stepped down.

It was an exhausting, bewildering, sometimes frightening, and often very exciting two weeks, in which there was little time to reflect on what might really be driving events. It had been building for months, perhaps years. The unexpectedly damaging impact of the financial crisis which had begun in Thailand the year before was one factor. The steadily eroding support for Suharto, and especially his pampered children, and his shaky health, was another.

The spark had been the inexplicable killing of four students at one of Jakarta's more privileged universities on May 12 1998. By then I had covered many student protests in Jakarta and other cities, many of them a lot more violent than the one I watched at Trisakti that day. In fact that protest had been remarkably good-natured, even though thousands of students confronted an equal number of riot police and troops, in the pouring rain. It seemed to be calming down, when shots suddenly rang out, and everyone scattered. When I was shown the blood-stained, sheet-covered bodies of four students later that evening, I reported for the first time that I thought Suharto's days were numbered.

But there was a lot we did not know, or could not confirm about those chaotic events. We were aware during the riots that ethnic Chinese Indonesians were being attacked – the BBC kept its own Singaporean cameramen off the streets once that became clear. But when reports



FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF THAILAND

MASARU GOTO/OWASA



An anti-government protester holds up picture of then-President Suharto in front of a bank that was set alight by a rampaging mob in central Jakarta on May 14, 1998. Photo by Jonathan Head.

emerged of large-scale rapes and murders, mostly from Taiwanese websites, things became much murkier. We never were able to speak to victims, or confirm details of these allegations, although they were widely believed.

And the question over who might have organized the riots was never answered either. The lack of action by the security forces was striking. Later, on some of our BBC video film of the looting, we noticed men who appeared to be intelligence agents standing back and appearing to direct the mobs.

Early inquiries pointed the finger at Prabowo Subianto, the mercurial commander of Kostrad, the army's main combat unit, and Suharto's son-in-law. His known political ambitions, his erratic behaviour after the riots, and his eventual sacking from his command, seemed to confirm this theory. But other fingers pointed at his arch-rival, armed forces commander Wiranto, who mysteriously absented himself from Jakarta during the worst of the riots, only to come back and assert his authority once they were dying down.

To this day no-one has established the real forces at work behind the drama of Suharto's fall from power. Perhaps no-one at the top really wants it to be known. After all, the people who prospered under Suharto have kept their privileges, and continued to prosper under the governments that replaced him. Efforts to hold Suharto and his family to account for massive corruption and human rights abuses have petered out. And in a wonderful irony, Prabowo and Wiranto, the two military men accused not just of being behind the Jakarta riots, but of many, many human right violations themselves, are now leading candidates for the presidency in what is now viewed as the most thriving democracy in South East Asia.

Those scenes I witnessed in Jakarta came flooding back to me early on the morning of April 13 this year on Din Daeng Road in Bangkok. The sight and smell of burning tyres. The occasional crack of gunshots. Frightened and angry shouts, and masked young men running back and forth from the barricades, taunting the line of soldiers a hundred meters away. The absence of ordinary street life, and a real adrenalin buzz walking down the empty road towards the billowing back smoke.

But there wasn't the sense of a regime tottering that we felt in Indonesia. There



was no valid comparison to be made between the two situations in any case. The fall of Suharto was an epic end to a 32 year-old authoritarian regime that had shaped modern Indonesia. Had the four month-old Abhisit administration fallen, it would have been the passing of just another short-lived government, albeit with worrying implications for Thailand's stability.

That never looked like happening. The Thai army units sent in to break up the red-shirt crowds were undisciplined at first, and sometimes lashed out unnecessarily at lone protesters, but by mid-morning they were clearly on top of the situation, and the talk of a "people's uprising" looked like overblown hyperbole by a few red shirt leaders who had got carried away by their unexpected success in disrupting the ASEAN summit in Pattaya.

But as in Jakarta, the April 13 events have left many questions unanswered.

How was it that a relatively small group of red shirt protesters were able to storm through police and army lines to take control of a hotel where such a high-level summit was taking place? Was Abhisit betrayed by his security forces? If so, by whom – the police, the army? Or did they underestimate the red shirts, and leave security too lax? What role did the arrival of the pro-government blue shirts play in changing the dynamics?

On the Sunday, why did Abhisit declare a state of emergency in Bangkok, having just ended a short-lived one in Pattaya to facilitate evacuating the

ASEAN delegates? Was it a fit of pique, over the embarrassment he'd suffered? Because the red shirt protests in Bangkok looked no more disruptive on Sunday that they had been the previous week.

Who, if anyone, ordered the attack on Abhisit's car at the Ministry of Interior, shortly after he announced the state of emergency? Did anyone? Or was it a spontaneous attack, rather than an assassination attempt, as some in the Prime Minister's office have claimed?

Was the Prime Minister struggling to get military units to enforce his state of emergency? There was a long, 12-hour delay between announcement and enforcement. Or was it just the logistical challenge of getting enough troops in position?

And was anyone killed by the troops? They certainly used some live rounds, and some were certainly fired at crowd level, though mostly into the buses driven at the troops. Journalists covering the clashes during the day saw no bodies, or fatally wounded people. But before dawn on Din Daeng, when the clashes were worse, are there any unaccounted deaths? Possibly. If so, almost certainly not many. The claims by some on the red shirt side of many deaths seem implausible though.

If past experience is any guide, we will never get clear answers to most of these questions. As I learned long ago in Indonesia, the truth is an elusive commodity here; there is little public clamour for it. Being a journalist in this region is often very frustrating. But I will miss it like hell when I'm gone. ■

Q&A with Jonathan Head, the BBC's departing Southeast Asia Correspondent and First Vice-President of the FCCT

Q: How many years have you had in Bangkok and have you enjoyed this time?

JH: I have lived in Bangkok a total of nearly six years, in two stints, first from November 2000 until June 2003, the second time from April 2006 until now. In between I was based in Japan, but spent quite a lot of time back here to see my wife, Jiraporn, including four months around the time our first son Oliver was born, in 2005. I never felt the powerful empathy and sense of belonging I had in Jakarta, but have grown to love this city for its willingness to accommodate all-comers from around the world, its endless energy, the extraordinary multiple layers of life here, the ingrained courtesy of its people.

Q: What are the big events you covered here and what insights did you gain from them?

JH: Big events? The most dramatic was the tsunami. I flew in from Japan for that one. I will never forget the scenes of death and devastation that confronted me when I arrived on Koh Phi Phi three days after the tsunami, nor the touching care with which the Thai volunteers handled the bodies of the victims. Then I went on to Aceh, which was a whole lot worse. Actually, the most important

event I covered here I think was the first election of Thaksin Shinawatra. Love him or hate him, he has changed Thai politics for ever, and perhaps showed how traditional politics could be shaken up by a wealthy, charismatic individual in the rest of the region. The coup was bizarre, so brief and undramatic that the BBC journos who flew out from London to help cover it found they had nothing to report by the time they got here.

Q: There's been a lot of attention lately on both local and foreign reports about Thailand's domestic political turmoil. You are one of the best known foreign correspondents; has that meant closer scrutiny of your work, more pressure or criticism over whatever angle you take on a story or development? Has it become a less pleasant place to report from?

JH: Thailand has certainly become more difficult for foreign correspondents to cover. The rift between the pro- and anti-Thaksin camps is now very deep and emotional, and it is difficult to avoid upsetting supporters on both sides. Actually, it will surprise many of my detractors to know I did not much enjoy dealing with Thaksin while he was PM, and had some unpleasant run-ins when I challenged him. But the abuse we get now is a whole lot worse, mostly from



the anti-Thaksin camp. Plenty from expats based here too.

In part it is because the BBC has such a high profile – I get abuse for pieces that are not substantially different from those of my colleagues, and they often get none. I am asked to analyse events in Thailand for the BBC website, and those seem to attract the most attention. I stand by everything I have written though. It is difficult to get across to the BBC's critics though that I take no sides; even if this were not a deeply-held personal principle, it would be impossible to pick a side in such a complex conflict.

Q: You are heading to Turkey, Istanbul. Are you and the family looking forward to that?

JH: Yes, we are moving to Istanbul. After so many years in this region, it is a real wrench to leave, and daunting to contemplate setting up home in an entirely new environment. Exciting – certainly, Istanbul is an amazing city. And there are some surprising parallels: a conservative establishment, backed by the military, judiciary and bureaucracy, clashing with a flawed, new electoral force, with a revered figure above it all who cannot be criticized... maybe I will feel right at home! ■



"The rift between the pro- and anti-Thaksin camps is now very deep and emotional, and it is difficult to avoid upsetting supporters on both sides."



PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY



MASARU GOTO/ONASIA



THIERRY FAUSE/ONASIA



NIK NOSTITZ/AGENCY FOCUS



ARHIT PERAWONGMEETHA/GETTY

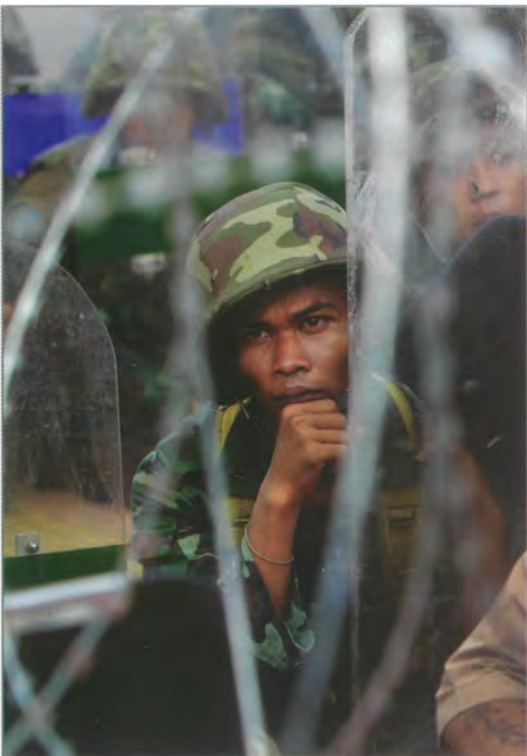


SIRIPONG KANJANAABUT/ONASIA



THIERRY FAUSE/ONASIA

Reds on the Rampage



PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY



PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY



PAULA BRONSTEIN/GETTY



ARHIT PERAWONGMEETHA/GETTY



SIRIPONG KANJANAABUT/ONASIA

Bangkok Burning

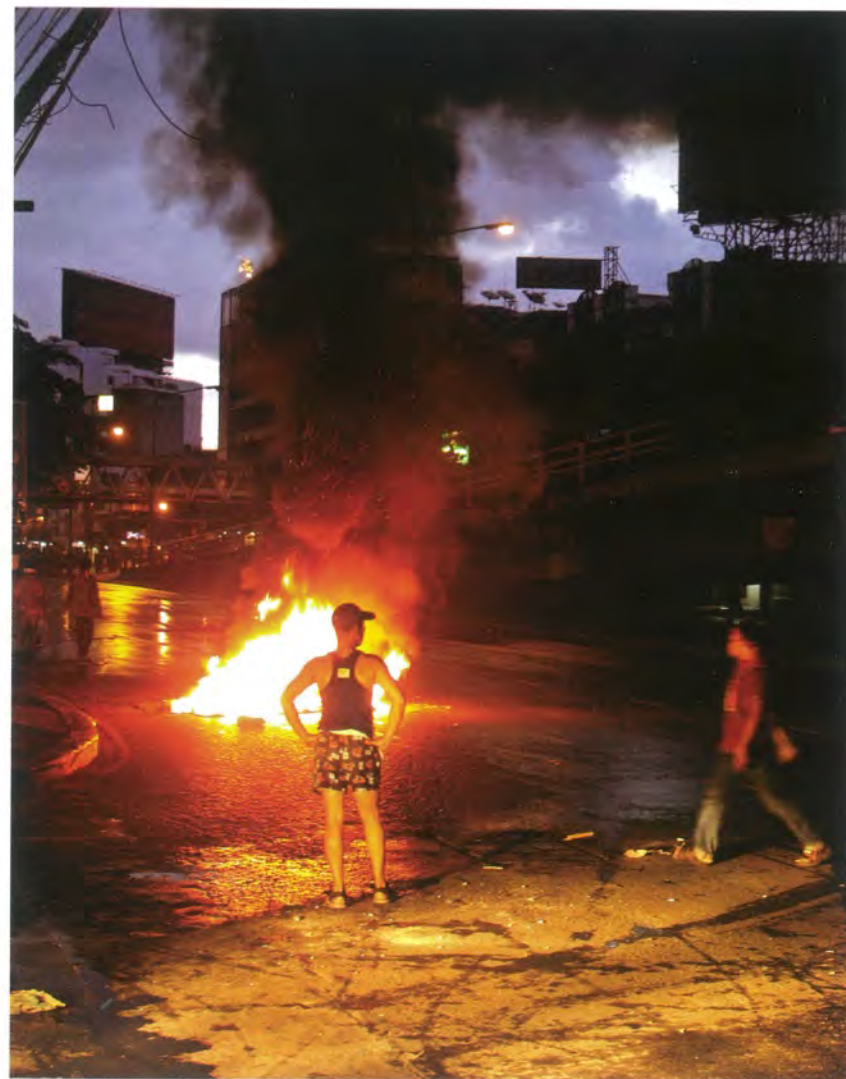
WORDS AND IMAGES BY NICK NOSTITZ

It is a few minutes before 5 am, April 13th, the first day of the Songkran holidays, Thai New Year, the water festival. It's dark, tires are burning, and shots are fired. The expected crackdown against the Red Shirt movement has begun one hour ago. A few dozen Red Shirts tell me of killed comrades, they say soldiers loaded their corpses on trucks.

I try to get closer to the frontlines, walk under the flyover at the Din Daeng crossing towards the army. A few bursts of automatic rifles, fleeing Red Shirts run towards me. I run with them, my bullet proof vest, the heat and plain fear slow me down. More tires get burned. I stand below a tree, several gun shots from the direction of the army, a bullet passes with an ugly slashing noise through the leaves of the tree. A few kids I have just photographed with petrol bombs in their hands escape. I take cover in a side alley, to allow myself to be overrun by the army. Two Red Shirts have found refuge there as well. They take off their red T-Shirts. Residents are hiding the two in their shop house. When soldiers arrive I walk out and identify myself as a journalist. By now it is already light.

For nearly three weeks the Red Shirts have already held their latest mass protest, against the government and what they define as "Amartayathipatai" – the rule of the traditional elites. Since March 26th they have surrounded Government House, the seat of the Thai cabinet. But unlike their nemesis – the PAD – last year, they have not invaded and occupied Government House.

On April 8th the Red Shirts called to their D-Day, and more than 100,000 protesters came from all over Thailand to encircle the residence of General Prem



Tinsulanonda, the head of the Privy Council, the main advisory board of King Bhumiphol. Exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, during his video-linked speeches to the Red Shirt protesters, accused Gen Prem and other members of the Privy Council of being

behind the 2006 military coup. For the royalist PAD and for many members of the government and the military this accusation nearly equates lese majeste.

When the Red Shirts blocked several of the most important roads, the situation tensed even more. Then the



Red Shirts went to Pattaya, to protest at the scheduled ASEAN summit. There they were attacked by a counter group – the Blue Shirts, which were by Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban called a citizen group that supported the Government, yet in fact were a collection of Navy personnel, PAD Guards, and people roused by Newin Chidchob from Buri Ram, sanctioned by the highest levels of politics and military. After the attacks, Red Shirts stormed the venue of the summit, the Royal Cliff Hotel. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva cancelled the summit, and called emergency rule over the whole province. When Red Shirts continued protesting in Bangkok, Abhisit also called the emergency decree over Bangkok and surrounding provinces. Red Shirts attacked Abhisit's motorcade in the grounds of the Interior ministry.

The leadership of the Red Shirts has lost almost all control over the angry protesters after the morning attack by the army at Din Daeng intersection. Protesters burned public buses as barricades, drove them into army lines on several occasions, and burned them. PAD fighters attacked Red Shirts with guns out of Petchaburi Soi 5, and wounded several. Red Shirts retaliated; burned food stalls in the Soi. Just before sunset fighting between slum residents with PAD affiliation and Red Shirts erupted at Yommarat, close to the Government House protest site, after Red Shirts set one more bus ablaze, and chased firefighters away. The slum residents shot guns at Red Shirts, Red Shirts threw petrol bombs.

The night saw terrible battles between Red Shirt protesters and residents at nearby Nang Loern district, a powerhouse of the ruling Democrat





Party, with many PAD fighters joining in against the Red Shirts. Two residents were killed. Witnesses said that several Red Shirts also died, but claim their corpses were taken away.

When the following day the army prepared for its final attack on the protest at Government House, the Red Shirt leadership gave up and canceled their protest at the last minute. Under the emergency decree three of their leaders, Veera Musikapong, Nattawut Saikua and Dr. Weng Tojirakan, were arrested and remained in prison for 11 days. Others went

briefly into the underground, and another leader, Jakrapop Penkair, former spokesman of the Thaksin Shinawatra government and a cabinet member in the Samak Sundaravej administration announced in interviews with foreign media from an undisclosed location that he would consider armed resistance. Community radio stations of the Red Shirts, their TV station, and several of their websites were closed by the government.

A still ongoing debate started if Red Shirts died, especially during the morning attack at Din Daeng intersection. The

government said that the army only used fake bullets against protesters, no real bullets. So far no proof surfaced that Red Shirts were killed, there are only lingering suspicions based on witness accounts of Red Shirt protesters and reports of missing people, yet to be independently confirmed.

Several days after the crackdown there was an assassination attempt against Sondhi Limthongkul, the main leader of the PAD. He survived with just with light injuries. It is generally assumed that the Red Shirts were not responsible for this, but a faction in the military that is equally against Red

Shirts and the yellow shirted PAD. Also Sondhi Limthongkul has pointed to a faction in the military during his first press conference after the assassination attempt. When I asked him after the press conference if it may be possible that in the future Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts may collaborate, he answered that both groups were looking for change, but that their aims would differ. This answer is a radical departure from his previous position, in which he replied to a similar question I asked a few days after last year's rioting at Oct. 7, that the Red Shirts had no education, no ideology, and were only bought.

What the future holds is unclear. There seem to be splits between the PAD and the ruling Democrat Party, who closely collaborated last year during the protests against the previous government, which was supported by the Red Shirts. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva presented himself both within Thailand and to the rest of the world as a prime minister that upholds democratic values, who would bring unity to the country and return Thailand to a state of normalcy.

But the real picture is completely different – the polarization not only remains, but may be worse than ever. The natural question is, of course, how much power Abhisit really has, even within his own party. The military is also very disturbed about the situation in the country, and there are increasing rumors of another coup if there is no parliamentary solution or end to mob rule in the streets. The PAD is now in the process of founding their own political party, to further their ultra-nationalist and semi-religious aims of "New Politics". The Red Shirt movement may have lost one battle, but its protests have already continued. ■



Pushbacks Exposed

PHUKET WEBSITE LINKED WITH SCMP TO REVEAL DRAMATIC PLIGHT OF ROHINGYA BOAT PEOPLE

By JIM POLLARD



Rohingya in a holding cell in Ranong. Many of his colleagues are thought to have drowned at sea. Photo: Steve Sandford.

One of the biggest stories in the region this year was the Thai Army's controversial treatment of Rohingya boat people who landed on its southwest or Andaman coast in December and January.

News that Rohingyas were being pushed back to sea and left to drift with little food or water was initially denied by the Abhisit government. However the new PM later admitted to CNN correspondent Dan Rivers that "pushbacks" had occurred and that inquiries were underway to determine what branch of the military was responsible for these acts – which survivors and journalists believe led to the deaths of hundreds of boat people.

The dramatic Rohingya controversy was unearthed by reporters on a Phuket website that, ironically, was not regarded as significant enough to have its stories included on Google new alerts.

Alan Morison, the editor of Phuketwan.com, also realized that full details of the scandal were "too big" for his small team to reveal, and "outside help" had to be sought.

Morison, a newsman with years of experience on some of Australia's top daily papers, said Phuketwan

had followed the plight of illegal immigrants closely since 54 Burmese suffocated in a container truck in Ranong in April 2008 after being smuggled into the country for work.

Late last year an officer from the Royal Thai Navy had called for UN help to manage the Burmese boat people. About 5,000 Rohingyas had reached Thailand the previous sailing season – November to April – in boats that often landed on the Andaman coast. And the Samak government had been looking at ways of dealing with them.

Navy staff had provided numerous photos of their personnel detaining boat people on beaches on the Andaman coast and nearby islands "doing what they are supposed to do". These, he said, were posted on the Phuketwan website.

What they didn't know initially – but learnt eventually via villagers in Ranong and sources in different sections of the military – was that plans for a holding facility on an island off the coast to detain boat people and deter further arrivals of Rohingyas were superseded by a covert operation to deal with the problem in other ways.



Rohingyan men hold up pieces of paper with their names and ID numbers. Photo: Steve Sandford

Morison was keen to go out on a vessel with Chutima Sidasathian, one of his reporters, to document how the boat people were handled once they reached Thailand or Thai waters.

They went to Ranong, three and half hours north of Phuket, and had an appointment to see the governor. They picked up a copy of the Bt10 *Southern News Ranong* and tucked away on an inside page was a story from a local council meeting which revealed the Army was going to take over handling of the Rohingyas. The boat people had become an issue of national security.

"We got interested in ISOC coming to the Andaman region. There was talk of a detention centre for holding boat people. We were alert of the possibility of a bloody good story happening... and felt we should have a look, but I was amazed at what we found out. We confirmed the Army was now running the process."

Morison relied on Chutima ("Oi"), a law graduate, who he said played a major role in finding the story. Contacts with the Navy and marine police gave them photos, which were posted online, over a period of months.

"I come up with a lot of ideas, but they [the reporters] are the ones that do the work."

"I thought the photos [of Rohingyas lying on the beaches after being detained by the Navy] were astonishing. They showed large bodies of men who may or may not be violent."

"We wanted to be on a Navy vessel so we saw what took place. Oi needed to talk to people as a reporter,



Sky and sun reflect on prison van. Photo: Alan Morison

but her contacts warned her not to take it beyond a certain point, so she said we shouldn't take this any further. We had sources saying that we couldn't report what was happening – villagers told us and we put two and two together.

"She actually called Colonel Manas (the local ISOC chief in charge of handling the Rohingya) and it reached the point where he challenged her, saying: 'Are you a Thai? Do you understand the need for stability?'"

Morison, who has worked in Phuket for six years, was "very hesitant to go too far". The story had got too hot, so he contacted the *South China Morning Post*, with whom he had a good relationship, having filed many stories for them following the tsunami.

"We thought there were risks involved. You gotta be aware of the dangers of doing the wrong thing."

The Hong Kong paper's foreign editor Ian Young sent reporter Greg Torode to take up the "pushback" controversy. "People in uniform were concerned about what was happening," Morison said. "But the Navy could only deny their involvement. They couldn't say 'Go and ask the Army'."

ISOC continued to deny any role in pushing the Rohingyas back to sea. But further probing revealed the Army had trained about two dozen villagers to become a local paramilitary, the core of which was suspected to be doing this.

The first story appeared on page 8 of the SCMP in mid-January, with a pointer on the front page. It was read by a tourist who sent in photos of people sunbaking on an island off Phuket – a short distance from Rohingyas forced to lie face down in the boiling sun.



Boat people show wounds on their backs, which they say were inflicted by Burmese officials. Photo: Steve Sandford.



Thai navy officers guard Rohingya refugees on Surin island. Photo: Thai Navy



Boat people are taken to court in Ranong. Photo: Alan Morison



A boatload of Rohingyas are towed while at sea. Details about this pic, believed taken by the Thai Navy, are disputed.

Morison interviewed the tourist over the phone and the SCMP ran that story as a front-page follow-up. "From then on all other elements were exposed. People at CNN and the BCC became quite concerned," he said.

Survivors told a BBC reporter in India's Andaman Islands that Thai officials were forcing illegal migrants back to sea. The headline, on a report from Calcutta, was damning: "Thais leave boat people to die."

With heavyweights like *The New York Times* following up on the drama, there were claims of a conspiracy by the "foreign media". Days later, a Foreign Ministry official lashed out at actress Angelina Jolie for commenting about the matter while visiting a refugee camp on the Thai Burma border (as an ambassador for the UN refugee body).

But while Thais cringed about the scandal, human rights groups and others working with refugees who knew the sorry plight of the Rohingya, viewed things differently. Suddenly an ethnic minority that had endured years of persecution in Burma and Bangladesh had the spotlight they so desperately needed. The UN and governments on every side of the Andaman were forced to find a better way to manage the Rohingyas' woeful predicament, most notably at home in Burma's Rakhine (or Arakan) State.

The "Forgotten People", as Rivers called them in three long reports on CNN, were a key item of debate when Asean leaders met at Hua Hin in late February.

"I was really pleased to see people like Dan Rivers and Jonathan Head stick with the story," Morison said. "For two clear weeks it was the biggest yarn in the region because boats were turning up in Indonesia and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and people were scratching their heads in other countries and that was undermining the Thai denials (of not pushing the boat people back to sea)."

While the Thai press was slow to follow-up the story — something Morison blamed on "kriengjai" (respect for seniors), he was sympathetic to Abhisit Vejjaviva and the Thai government about the predicament they faced, saying answers to the Rohingya crisis were "pretty hard to find".

"What is disturbing is that this issue has been overlooked for 30 years. But at least it's out there now."

Malaysia's treatment of Rohingyas

"reprehensible", he felt, noting that all boat people got six strokes of the whip plus three to six months jail before being stuck in a "revolving door" of being expelled and smuggled back to the country.

Seeing the Rohingya survivors brought to Ranong court in late January was vindication for their efforts, Morison thought.

"They were the lucky ones: the first Rohingya boat people in about eight weeks who had not been transferred to the Thai Army and pushed back out to sea, where hundreds had drowned. Photos of these Rohingyas, saved from expulsion at sea, told us what we needed to know: that journalistic curiosity, and perhaps a little bit of courage, can have positive consequences."

Morison, 61, has worked on papers in Australia, London and Brunei since joining the *Melbourne Herald* in the late 60s. He has been involved in various start-ups and online sections, plus the *Brunei Times* and CNN.com "before the Internet bubble burst". He had two years on the *Phuket Gazette*, as chief sub, before becoming a reporter again after the tsunami hit in December 2004. Returning to reporting, he said, was like being a character in Clint Eastwood's 'Space Cowboys', a movie about elderly astronauts who get a chance to go back into space.

"I'm a reporter now the way I was back in the 60s, except I have to take my own photos. It's amazing to be part of that process, and also do the editing. I love it."

"It's a different world down here. We work seven days a week, but I like this life — I like telling people's stories. But we'll hit the wall later this year unless we get major sponsors."

Phuketwan.com has broken numerous scoops in the 15 months since the site was set up. Morison felt frustrated at the "failings" of Google, the key Internet gate-keeper, and being stuck in a digital "limbo land".

"It really annoys me that we can publish scoops but (Google) still doesn't discriminate between good and bad," he said. "What do you do if Google doesn't pick you up? The greatest story in the world could be on a local Internet site that nobody knows about. The Internet is drowning in muck that doesn't deserve to be there." ■

Google agreed in mid-March to include stories from Phuketwan.com in its news alerts. Dan Rivers won an award from Amnesty International for his reports on the Rohingyas.

The Forgotten People: Photographs by Nic Dunlop



Rohingyan refugees at the Dum Dum Mea camp in Bangladesh in March 2007. Aid workers said they received virtually no assistance and conditions were some of the worst they had seen. Waterborne parasites, malnutrition and outbreaks of disease were rife.

Nong Khai Refugees

A Key Test For Thailand

THE WOEFUL HANDLING OF A GROUP OF Hmong HILLTRIBE PEOPLE STUCK IN THE IMMIGRATION DETENTION CENTRE AT NONG KHAI – FOR MORE THAN 900 DAYS – IS TESTAMENT TO THE THAI ARMY'S INABILITY TO PROPERLY ASSESS CLAIMS FOR REFUGEE STATUS BY PEOPLE FLEEING GROSS ABUSES IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES.

ROGER ARNOLD SAYS THAILAND NEEDS TO RECOGNIZE THAT TURNING A BLIND EYE TO WELL-DOCUMENTED ATROCITIES COULD DO GRAVE DAMAGE TO ITS INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION.



Some of the 158 Hmong held at Nong Khai Immigration Detention Centre are linked to a notorious massacre. They say they fled to Thailand after the Lao Army killed 26 of their relatives. This incident occurred on April 6, 2006 while the group was foraging for food in the mountains above Vang Vieng.

According to the group only one adult male was killed, the rest were women and children – 17 children. Some of the dead are pictured here with their husbands holding them in their arms. These same families fled to Thailand seeking asylum, but instead of screening them to assess

their claims for refugee status, the Thai military forcibly repatriated them, in a group of 160 Hmong on June 9, 2007.

On July 1, 2006, I hiked into the Lao jungle where the group was hiding. I was taken to see the shallow graves of the dead and took statements from the survivors. The Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded by claiming the incident was a fabrication. They said an investigation had been completed and it concluded there was no attack, no massacre. But the Hmong survivors I spoke with claim no Lao officials interviewed witnesses or visited the crime scene. I asked the Lao Government for a copy of their report but

Mrs Bao Thao, one of 26 Hmong alleged to have been killed by the Lao Army April 6, 2006, in the mountains above Vang Vieng. Her surviving relatives in the photo fled to Thailand seeking asylum but were forcibly repatriated on June 9, 2007.

received no response.

When I interviewed this group in the jungle they said they just wanted to surrender to the United Nations. They claimed they had no bad intentions toward the Lao Government. They were just tired of running and hiding. Many had bullet wounds including the women.

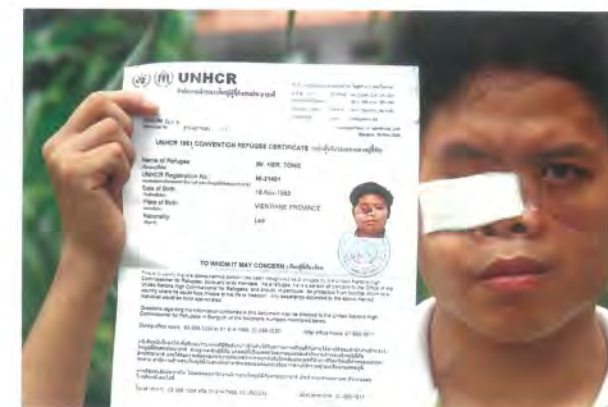
After years in the jungle this group of Hmong fled to Thailand in September

2006. They fled here because the Lao Government refused to allow them to surrender to the UN. In Bangkok, UNHCR staff screened the group and gave all them refugee status as "persons of concern".

Despite this, the group was arrested by Thai police on November 17, 2006, and taken to Nong Khai jail. Shortly after, on January 30, 2007, Thai and Lao authorities tried to forcibly repatriate them. But the move was unsuccessful because the Hmong men barricaded themselves in their jail cell and vowed to commit mass suicide rather than submit to being sent back to Laos. The refugees report being gassed at close range (probably fire extinguishers) by Lao officials trying to enter their cell. Some still claim to suffer respiratory problems from the gas powder. They gave me a sample of the substance as I was at the scene.

I have visited the Nong Khai group 16 times and each time they repeat, "We would rather kill ourselves in Thailand than be sent back to Laos". The group includes 91 children, 11 of whom are infants born at the jail. They have endured appalling, cramped conditions, detained in a small windowless cell for up to 22 hours a day for more than 900 days. They have started to become a cause celebre among long-term expats, some of who have started a Facebook group dedicated to ending their miserable treatment in Thailand.

To add to the Nong Khai group's sorrow, 160 of their close relatives, who fled from the same massacre in Laos, were forcibly repatriated by Thailand on June 9, 2007. (Again some are pictured here holding their dead wives). This forced repatriation caused panic in the Nong Khai group and five men fled, fearing they would be the next to be sent back. The remaining 150-plus Hmong who abided by Nong Khai detention rules and did not



Refugee Tong Her holds his UNHCR refugee papers next to a massive bullet wound he claims was inflicted by a gun shot from the Lao Army.

escape were punished by being locked up – 24 hours a day for almost two months – not allowed outside to see the sun. Thai authorities finally relented when the entire group, including the children, held a hunger strike in protest.

I was present when they were eventually allowed out. All were covered in sores and rashes and found being in the sun too painful due to lack of exposure. This incident and numerous other episodes have kept me awake many nights. It is difficult to accept that Thai and international NGOs, embassy officials and legal experts have allowed the rights of so many children to be abused so flagrantly for so long without more public outcry. Some Thais have confided that they are embarrassed and sickened by what the Army has forced officials at Nong Khai to do. Over the past year the IOM has been allowed to improve their conditions but the overall situation remains abusive.

The Nong Khai group is just 15 minutes drive from Vientiane. For more than two and a half years, the Lao Government has had easy access and opportunity to try to win their hearts and minds. Instead it has routinely waged psychological warfare against the group. The most recent abuse was March 10

this year when a huge Lao Government entourage was allowed to intimidate, threaten and lie to the refugees while they cowered in their cell, another sad scene that I witnessed. The Lao delegation told these UNHCR-recognised refugees no one would help them and that they had no choice but to return to Laos. This was despite America, Canada, The Netherlands and Australia all agreeing more than two years ago to take the group – if Thailand delivers on its recent pledge to allow the Nong Khai Hmong to be resettled overseas.

To be fair to Thailand, most people close to the Hmong issue acknowledge there are many fake refugees making false claims against Laos. However, there is also an unknown number of legitimate refugees who deserve protection in Huay Nam Khao refugee camp (currently housing about 4,700 people), in Phetchabun. Thailand claims it has screened all the Hmong from Laos, but the Nong Khai group – and their 160 relatives forcibly repatriated June 9, 2007 – are perhaps the most obvious example that the Thai Army is simply incapable of performing this task justly.

Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya is attempting to resolve these delicate matters with their neighbour. Sadly, he recently commented that the Hmong in Nong Khai would have to be returned to Laos. I would sincerely urge him to reassess the plight of the Nong Khai Hmong; send an impartial third party to hear their pleas for help and see their bullet wounds; then allow them passage abroad – via the most convenient international exit: Bangkok. Thailand needs to recognize that serious abuses have occurred in neighbouring lands and pandering blindly to bilateral relations is a major impediment to justice and any chance of putting a stop to such atrocities. Surely, the time for quiet diplomacy is over. ■



Some of the 91 UNHCR child refugees inside the tiny jail cell at Nong Khai IDC. 11 babies have been born at the jail.

Writing Behind Bars

WORKING IN BURMA AS A JOURNALIST IS TOUGH. WRITING POETRY, TELLING JOKES OR
CRITICIZING THE MILITARY REGIME RISKS A SEVERE JAIL SENTENCE.
PHIL THORNTON REPORTS.



Aung Kyaw Oo carries the scars from 14 years in jail. Photo: Phil Thornton.

To get their work published Burmese journalists have to first submit it in triplicate to the Press Scrutiny Registration Division for approval. The process can take up to three weeks, rendering news stories useless. Articles criticizing the regime or their policies are censored and risk jail for their authors.

Khin Maung is a senior journalist working for a weekly magazine. (a pen name used for reasons of personal security).

"It is impossible to write the truth. We censor our own work. Everything is screened. For me I have to write under another name. We know our news is not going to be

published inside the country so we send it to the exiled media."

In 2007 the Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Burma the second-worst country for media freedom, just in front of North Korea.

And in a report on Burma in 2008, the US-based Human Rights Watch fingered Burma as one of the "...most repressive countries on earth in terms of its restrictive press laws and its frequent practice of jailing journalists."

The regime's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) rules Burma with an iron fist. To ensure control is maintained the SPDC has

a vast network of institutions and informers to repress and generate fear among its citizens.

The Association Assisting Political Prisoners (AAPP) estimates Burma currently has 2,123 political prisoners in jail, including 41 journalists. In spite of international condemnation the regime continues to jail its opponents, in September this year 140 people were arrested for political reasons.

In what was seen as a cynical stunt to disrupt international events planned to commemorate last year's monk and civilian protests in Rangoon, the regime released 9002 prisoners, only seven of these were political, the rest classified by AAPP as 'petty criminals'.

One of the seven released was journalist U Win Tin, Burma's longest serving political prisoner, who served 19 years of a 20-year sentence. His crime? A phone call to advise a worried father that his fugitive son was okay and in a safehouse.

As an award-winning journalist and a member of the executive of the National League of Democracy, the outspoken U Win Tin was seen as a threat by the regime.

U Win Tin was arrested in June 1989 and given a three-year sentence with hard labor. He spent months in solitary confinement and upset the generals further when he refused an offer to work with the dictatorship, declaring he would "fight to the death against the philosophy of military power." For his stance his sentence was extended by another 11 years.

Aung Kyaw Oo spent 14 of his 40 years behind bars. A member of a non-violent pro-democracy student union he was arrested and charged with breaches of the Illegal Association Act and sentenced to 12 years in the notorious Insein Prison.

"We can be jailed or killed for talking or writing about politics. We have to hide what we do. If we join them [regime] we can have a good life in Burma, but I couldn't consider this."

For Aung Kyaw Oo the worst part was the first six months.

"I was not allowed any contact with the outside or my family. I was held in a cell with four others. We slept on the floor, had one blanket each, shared dirty drinking water, our toilet a dirty, uncovered bowl stank. I was allowed 10 minutes outside the cell each day and the cell light was switched on at night. They punched and kicked me. I bled from the ear. They hooded me so I couldn't see them. They put me in iron shackles. All through the night people cried and screamed. They told me 'Welcome, you are now nothing'."

Without mosquito nets it was no surprise Aung Kyaw Oo got malaria.

"They took me to the clinic. There were no beds, I slept on the floor. They used the same needle on all the prisoners. I got very sick from this. I'm angry that they did this.

I got sicker and sicker. I had poor food, I was malnourished, depressed, angry, sad and couldn't see my family."

Aung Kyaw Oo says in spite of the harsh sentence he was finally given, it came as a relief.

"I could see my family. I was no longer in nowhere land."

During his time in prison Aung Kyaw Oo met and worked with U Win Tin.

"He was old, but strong. He always stood up for his rights. Everybody respected him. He stood in front when we protested - he always led. He retained his humanity. He was the best of what a human could be."

Witnessing abuses on inmates, U Win Tin recruited Aung Kyaw Oo and others to compile a report of the incidents.

"For three months I collected facts - dates, names, times, and sent them to U Win Tin for editing. We then sent the report to the UN."

The prison authorities retaliated by punishing the political prisoners by adding more years to their sentences.

"I was given an additional seven years on top of the 12-years. They searched the whole cellblock. They found our notepaper, pencils, batteries, novels, journals and four pocket radios. They took away four truckloads."

In 2004 Aung Kyaw Oo became seriously ill.

"I was prescribed the wrong medicine. I went into toxic shock and I bled. I was put in a cell with U Win Tin; he looked after me. He never stopped writing. He'd use the floor and walls. He was strong. He always owned up to what he did, but fought against what he didn't do."

If the regime thought the 19-year jail sentence would deter U Win Tin from speaking out they were wrong. Speaking to journalists on his release in Rangoon he defiantly announced: "Starting today, I am going to continue supporting Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy. I will soon be 80, but I am not going to stop."

Aung Kyaw Oo now works on the Thai-Burma border for the Association Assisting Political Prisoners.

"We are all former political prisoners. We can't forget those we left behind or those still being locked away. We have to fight for them."

Aung Kyaw Oo struggles to stop himself from crying as he thinks of the lost years and says he still carries mental and physical scars of his 14 years in jail.

"My health is not good, my blood is ruined. I have trouble walking and have muscle pain all the time. I'm poor, but I have my beliefs and hopes. [But] I have no regrets; it's what we have to do." See www.aappb.org

Phil Thornton is a freelance journalist who lives in the Thai border town of Mae Sot. He is the author of 'Restless Souls - rebels, refugees, medics and misfits on the Thai Burma border' published by Asia Books. ■

◆ Photographer and author **Nic Dunlop** has been mentioned often in coverage of the belated Khmer Rouge tribunal in Phnom Penh. First in the dock there was **Duch**, commandant of Tuol Sleng, the infamous interrogation centre where some 17,000 people were processed for death in the 1970s. It was the perseverant Dunlop who found Duch near the Thai border a decade ago. Some have speculated that Dunlop may have had a particularly powerful ally in his search. Writing in *Asia Times Online*, **Stephen Kurczy** reported:

'A Christian convert, Duch told the court on April 22 that Jesus Christ guided Dunlop to Samlot town. "I told Nic Dunlop, 'Christ brought you to meet me'." The remarks echoed Dunlop's account in his book *The Last Executioner*, where he quotes Duch saying: "It is God's will that you are here. Now my future is in God's hands."

"I'm told that he's angry with me still," Dunlop told Kurczy, noting that all his efforts to contact Duch since his arrest have failed.

◆ Speaking of men of God, **Jesse Jackson** recently made a return visit to the FCCT. He was greeted by a huge number of executive committee members. Tired from his travels, and perhaps not entirely certain if he was in Thailand or Malaysia, Jackson's eyes began to glaze over as an unending succession of presidents, vice-presidents and directors of this and that introduced themselves. To break the monotony, **Dominic Faulder** announced simply: "I'm the treasurer." Jackson's face immediately lit up. "Yo da man," he exclaimed, pumping Faulder's hand who, unusually, was at a loss for words.

◆ When does Francophonie lead to Francophobia? The affable **Marc Laban** of AsiaWorks was astonished to open his mailbox one morning and find a 'To Whom it May Concern' roundly lambasting a French correspondent he barely knows, and who happens not to be an FCCT member. Identifying themselves only as "human from Southeast Asian country," the plaintiffs drubbed the undiplomatic hack: "... we always hear him talking bad and insulting about us even in front of us in French language and thinking by himself that we Asian people will never know French language."

One can only hope the French badmouth does not speak any of the local vernaculars and find out what is being said about him. How should feathers be unruffled? The plaintiffs had a suggestion: "In our opinion, we think that someone should inform him about his behaviour towards local people ... and please inform him about this note as it would be only way that he will listen." Consider the job done - assuming he speaks English, and can read.

◆ *Au contraire*, photographer **Roland Neveu** speaks French, is a valued member of the FCCT, and charms everybody he meets. He also never forgets a favour. "You introduced me to Prince Rainier and Grace in the early 1980s," he inscribed in the book presented to **Kurt Wachtveitl** after his farewell address to the club as outgoing general manager of The Mandarin Oriental. Neveu was recently in Brazil conducting a photo workshop for the World Health Organization in a Rio di Janeiro *favela* - the rather romantic sounding word for 'slum' in Portuguese. The locals no doubt had nothing but good things to say about Neveu - although admittedly it is generally safer to be rude about foreigners in Portuguese than French.

Jim Coyne, who is never rude to anyone, provided another memorable inscription in the book for Wachtveitl: "I was married at The Oriental in 1983 - it was the destination in Bangkok. My wife was married there once before and now may be married there a third time. Is there a frequent marriage program?"

◆ Sadly, BBC correspondent **Jonathan Head** is leaving Bangkok for Istanbul. As the FCCT's first vice-president, he has sat a mere heartbeat from the seat of power for two terms. It is a fair bet that he will not be meeting up in Turkey with the elusive Thai politician **Jakrapob Penkair**, whose whereabouts we are led to believe remain a complete mystery to the entire Thai press corps. This

hasn't stopped many of them claiming Jakrapob is a close friend of Head's - although the two have only actually met three times. Similar rumours circulated about Head's 'relationship' with ousted prime minister **Thaksin Shinawatra**. Proof included a supposedly incriminating photograph of the two shaking hands in 2001. For the record, Thaksin stormed out of one of their three interviews, and admonished Head publicly for asking a stupid question at Suvarnabhumi International Airport. The incident was widely reported in the Thai media. The question? Why make a big show of landing in an aircraft and 'opening' an airport that was manifestly many months from completion.

In a possible attempt to confuse further Head's already muddled critics, **Annie Phrommayon**, Asia producer at the BBC's Bangkok bureau, compiled the obligatory photo album for his departure. Filled with heart-warming photos, notes and testaments from Head's friends and colleagues all over the world, there was oddly not a word from Thaksin or Jakrapob. There was, however, definitely a shot of Head chewing the ear off of Prime Minister **Abhisit Vejjajiva**, whom he has interviewed four times - for whatever that's worth.

It must be said that Annie's photo album (which due to the UK's draconian Official Secrets Act has been confined to a global circulation of less than 10,000) raises grave concerns that Head dyed his hair orange for his wedding day. Blood, sweat and tears went into its preparation. At least one contributor got a taste of the ruthless efficiency Annie brings to her work at the BBC. "Even **Ramos Horta** didn't have as many queries as you do," she blasted a hapless FCCT board member seeking guidance on an appropriate input. The person concerned, who has asked not to be identified, conceded that his first error was to send Annie a "blurry" photograph of a bemused Head with other FCCT board members. Its only significance was that it had been taken during a weekly board meeting while Thai police rummaged around the BBC offices next door, allegedly in search of Jakrapob. Annie did not regard the blurry picture as either artistic, historic or newsy. "Err.... it's not in focus!" she growled.

◆ Followers of this irregular column may recall **Graham Watts**, the former *Financial Times* journalist and media training guru living in Bangkok. He distracts himself from a seriously painful back problem by dissecting the local English-language media. He recently came across a report in the social pages which many of us missed - the sort of stuff you really can't make up. Watts takes up the story:

"It was one of those routine line-ups of hi-so folks attending a celeb do, in this case the latest offerings of one **Chutchai Chairitthilert**, described as a "jewellery designer and entrepreneur." What caught my eye was one of the pictures, but even more breathtaking than the picture was this last sentence of the story: "The night was capped off with Chuchai's masterpiece, a 500-million-baht diamond-studded jockstrap, worn by male model **Sam Chotiban** - which unleashed non-stop camera flashes and screams. Half a billion baht. Now isn't that depressing?"

◆ And now for something completely different. A particularly strident politician at a political rally last year accused the perennially impoverished photographer (and alleged minor German aristocrat) **Nick Nostitz** of having been paid ten million baht to take dramatic pictures of political violence around parliament and government house on the night of 7 October. Nostitz for one wishes it was true. "I could really use ten million baht - I am seriously broke," Nostitz admitted as he scrounged a beer at the Photo Zero show opening at Rain Dogs. Truth be told, most people would not take the same risks as the perennially bahtless Nostitz does for any amount of money. One of his most terrifying moments was getting caught up in shooting while covering the same political faction behind the politician who accused him of having been paid money to take the photographs in question. How's that for an amazing coincidence? ■

Remember, you read it here first ...

i think, therefore IB



KIS International School is an IB world school through and through. The school is authorized for all three International Baccalaureate programmes for students from 3-18 years (Primary Years, Middle Years and IB Diploma). KIS lives and breathes the IB philosophy, offering a high-quality education, encouraging international-mindedness, and instilling a positive attitude to learning.

KIS guides students to be engaged global citizens and lifelong learners by offering a broad and balanced international curriculum of high academic standards.

KIS is a leading light in IB education. Contact us for more information or to visit our spacious campus, located near Asoke-Ratchadapisek.



World School



Accredited



Affiliate

www.kis.ac.th

TEL +66 (0) 2274 3444

kis

International School
Knowledge Inspiration Spirit

Certified International Standards

Accredited with HA JCI and DCSC standards through continuous improvements to our medical staff's capabilities and healthcare services



Technology for Life

Medical technology is constantly advancing. Samitivej employs the latest innovations to make our medical services faster and more convenient, resulting in greater freedom and quality of life for you



Total Samitivej Experience

An experience beyond warm and friendly service. An online presence allows you to instantaneously access medical files and test results through high-speed internet or through the infotainment screen located at a patient's bed



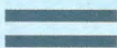
Unified Communications

Increasing the responsiveness and effectiveness of our medical and patient management systems with IP Phone technology



Hospital without Walls

Revolutionizing healthcare by utilizing breakthroughs in IT technology to allow patients to receive personalized medical care outside the hospital



Our ambition is to develop continuous, full-coverage medical services by employing the latest medical innovations, resulting in a safer and more precise treatment and care. You can then have the utmost confidence in choosing Samitivej Hospital as your lifetime companion.

Healthcare Revolution
นวัตกรรมดูแลชีวิต



0-2711-8181
www.samitivejhospitals.com



30th
ANNIVERSARY
สมิติเวช
SAMITIVEJ