

The Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand Magazine

Second Quarter 1992

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Dateline Bangkok, the FCCT's quarterly magazine, welcomes story or photo-essay contributions from our journalist and associate members. Please contact Peter Janssen (238-4142) Jeremy Vine (233-8030).

Cover photo shows FCCT member Paul Handley of the Far Eastern Economic Review at the arrest of Chamlong. (photo courtesy of Thai Rat).

A Letter from Your President...



This last quarter was clearly marked by the events of May 17 to 20, during which time all our correspondent members were swept up in the coverage of the military crackdown on tens of thousands of unarmed pro-democracy protesters. No matter how each of us sees this period in Thailand's modern history, we would each have plenty to say.

Some of you may well remember a lively Wednesday night discussion in which Nation group editor Suthichai Yoon and Bangkok Post editor Paisal Sricharatchanya took part. That discussion, on the role of the English Language Press in Thailand, set the backdrop for our coverage of the turn of events. Both editors were candid with their views and their predictions on the Thai military's continued domination of politics, and many Club members benefitted enormously from the stimulating discussion on the possibilities that awaited Thailand.

In the immediate aftermath of the May tragedy, our Club served as the most informative forum in Bangkok, to share experiences encountered during the period. We collectively observed a minute of silence to remember all those who died, and our thoughts also went to the hundreds of others who were injured, mainly from gunshot wounds.

Film footage of the clashes produced by colleagues working for television networks, plus eyewitness accounts from other journalists and cameramen who were present at different times on various days and nights, helped many of us piece together a better picture of the whole sequence of events.

I am sure that many of our members are still talking about the unedited film footage that was shown at the Club, combined with comments and insights from panellists or from fellow-members and their guests. Many FCCT members, be they journalists or associates, gained additional insights from these post-event discussions.

My thanks again to Visnews, BBC, NHK and to all other FCCT members and guests present at these discussions. Attendance at those sessions was more than just worthwhile.

I must also record here my thanks to members of our Programmes Committee, headed by Second Vice-President Bertil Lintner. Committee members Pannada Lertlum-Ampai and Annabel Anderson also acted super fast to put together a series of news-related Wednesday night programmes while Imtiaz Muqbil singlehandedly organised a lunchtime panel discussion on the impact of the May crackdown on the tourist and travel trade.

Considering that all of them were very busy at that time, coping with the demands of individual employers, I should even say I am filled with gratitude for their contribution.

Thanks are also due to members of the professional committee, headed by Immediate Past President Dominic Faulder, who took time off from a busy schedule to write a lengthy report on incidents involving journalists during that period. The report documents the hazards of our profession.

Such heady talk over these last months - and the need to let our hair down after such intense moments - prompted the Board to decide that we will form a Social Sub-Committee to help plan activities less related to our work.

We would like to retain the Sunday opening for the club, but attendance has been so poor that we estimate we will lose more than 70,000 baht yearly just by chalking up expenses from staff overtime payments. Unless we continually organise rugs sales - as we did on Sunday, May 10th - or some other similar activities, such as a

members' flea market or top-notch documentary films, the Sunday opening might be pointless. However, instead of reverting to the old arrangement of shutting our Club on Sundays, we would like a group of members, especially from among our associates, to help plan family-related activities for Sundays and other social activities on weekdays.

We would welcome anyone interested in taking charge of social activities that can range from bridge-playing to jam sessions with guest Disc-Jockeys. If you're interested, just leave your name with Club manager Eric Brighton, and we'll be in touch with you soon!

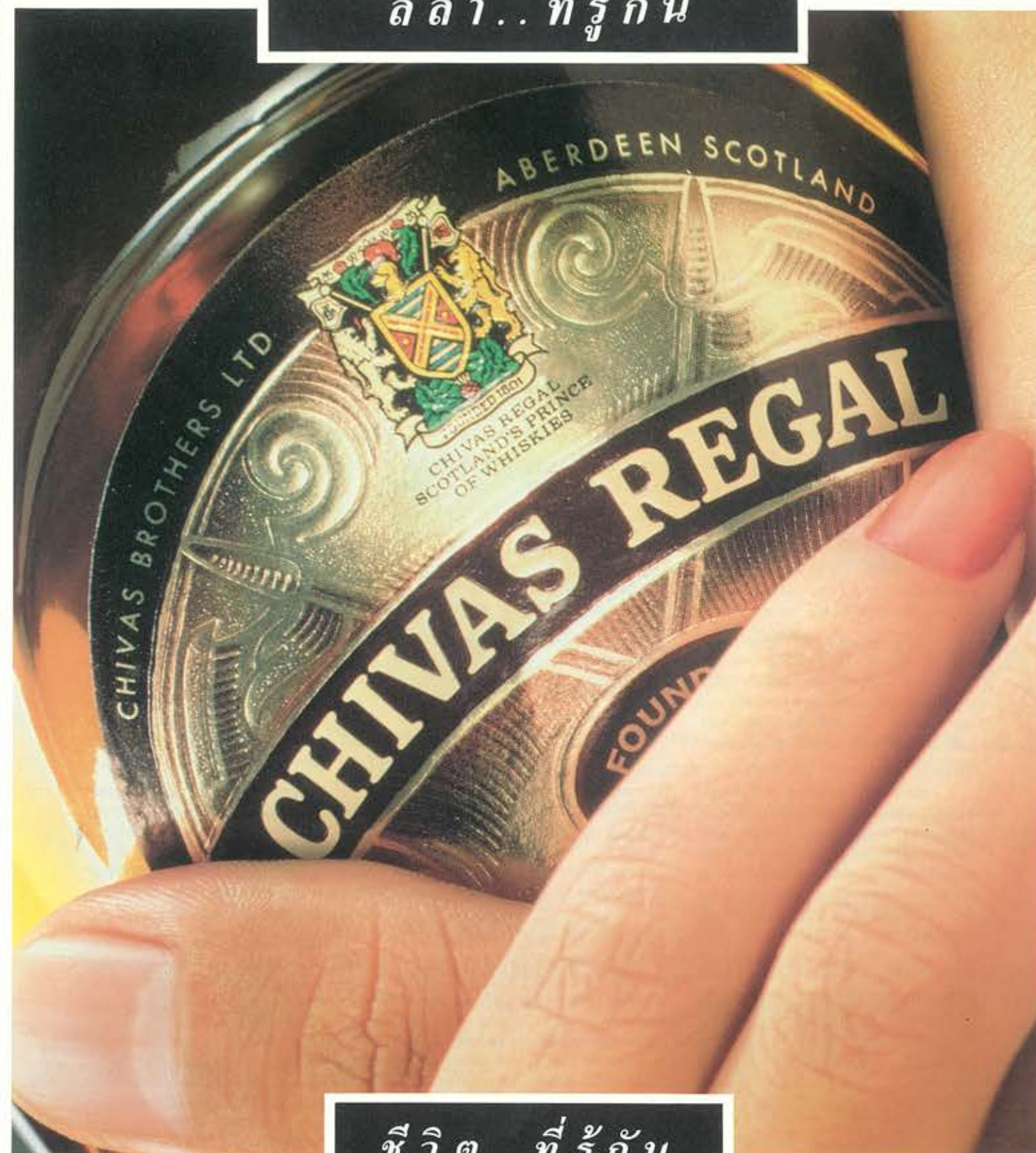
During this last quarter, two of our correspondent members left Bangkok to take up postings in Beijing, China. Sheila Tefft of the Christian Science Monitor was a valuable Board member - so we are looking for someone to replace her as Corresponding Secretary - and Teresa Poole of the Independent newspaper never did quite get the chance to prove her worth as our Club tennis convenor!

But I have no doubt that my colleagues and fellow Board members will join me in wishing them both well in their new posting. Both were enthusiastic about doing a crash course in learning the Chinese language. But they will surely miss Thailand's *sabai-sabai* atmosphere as they steer their way through the austere mannerisms of the Middle Kingdom! Interim Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun's address to our club on July 1st at the Dusit Thani's Ballroom successfully wrapped up our half-year of activities.

And until you hear from me in the next, I look forward to seeing more of you at the Clubhouse.


Tan Lian Choo

ดีด... ที่รู้กัน



ชีวิต... ที่รู้กัน

Club Highlights

With all the recent political turmoil and intrigues the Club, a perfect place to catch the latest news and rumours, was buzzing with activities in May and June.

Many may have forgotten that the violent events of May 17-20 were preceded by a Sunday morning "no-questions" press conference at the FCCT with Michael Aris, the erudite husband of Nobel prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Aris, just back from a two-week visit with his wife at her Rangoon home (where she's been under house arrest since July 20, 1989) debunked rumours that Suu Kyi had sold her piano to meet expenses. Just some broken strings and stuck keys, he explained, putting the dagger in one of Bangkok's best products of "visionary journalism."

One of the most heavily attended programs was the May 27th showing of unedited film footage of anti-government protests. Usually, Wednesday night programs attract 100 or so people, but the viewing that night drew a record 218.

"They had to sit on the floor," said Club manager Eric Brighton. Response was so overwhelming that the Club scheduled additional screenings on the 28th, and again on the 30th. Both showings were again packed and drew 198 and 98 people respectively.

At least somewhere in Bangkok it's still possible to get an exact headcount. During the frantic protest coverage, many correspondents pulled their hair out trying to nail down the elusive death toll which fluctuated between Suchinda's 40 to the more than 12,000 allegedly reported by one news agency.

The film footage shown at the Club



Michael Aris, husband of Aung San Suu Kyi, initiated a 'no-questions' press conference at the FCCT on May 17th.

included BBC tapes flown back from London and Hong Kong, as well as tapes provided by FCCT member David McKaige, South East Asia Bureau Chief for Visnews. The Club also scheduled a June 20th lunchtime showing of additional footage, including some from NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation).

The recent political uncertainties forced last minute changes for two Wednesday night programs. On May 6, Thai politicians from the opposition and government camps had been scheduled to speak at the club, but that evening they found themselves stuck in debates in Parliament. Fortunately for FCCT members however, three excellent speakers agreed



Prime Minister Anand was the guest speaker at the FCCT on July 1st.

to pinch-hit. They were Professor Varakorn Samakoses, Dean of the Economics Faculty of Thammasat University; Professor Likhit Dhiravegin, who teaches political science at Thammasat University, and Graham Catterwell, a representative of Crosby Research Ltd.

Most people who reserved seats turned up to hear their replacement speakers, but the word is that a few who had their hearts set on catching a glimpse of Thailand's first ever politician/hearthrob, MP Aphisit Vejajiva of the Democrat party, cancelled their reservations after learning the 27-yr old Oxford University graduate would not be speaking at the program.

Aphisit did, however, show up at the club June 3 for a program comparing political activism in the 1970's and the 1990's. The discussion also featured two student leaders from the 1970's - Seksan Prasertkul and Theerayuth Boonmee - as well as Parinya Thevanarumitkul, the current Secretary General of the Students Confederation of Thailand.

Then there was the classic example of just how quickly political developments

can influence decision making. A day before outgoing Japanese Ambassador Hisahiko Okazaki was scheduled to speak at the Club May 20th, his staff confirmed that the ambassador would appear. Twenty minutes later, they called to postpone. Try to figure that one out. The Ambassador later rescheduled for a June 24 appearance at the Club.

The award for this month's most patient audience goes to those who waited for the program, "Who are the 'Mon' and what are they fighting for?" Originally slated for May 27, the program was bumped back twice because of fast-changing political events. Our hats off to the 67 diehards who loyally held onto their reservations.

As expected, the May program on refugees and demining in Cambodia attracted plenty of interest. "Cambodia is very popular," said Club Assistant Manager Panjavilai Song-Im. "It's always a full house." Members please take note. If you want a guaranteed seat at any program on Cambodia, please book a seat early.

The Club rounded off mid-year 1992 with a dinner/speech with newly appointed Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun. Although it was his third appearance in front of an FCCT audience the urbane premier attracted a crowd of more than 500.

On the lighter side, fun activities at the Club included a May 10 Oriental rug sale featuring 150 new and antique rugs from the Middle East, all offered at discount prices. Members bought 90,000 baht worth of rugs and it was a pleasure to see so many turn up on a lazy Sunday.

The FCCT "Speak Thai" Programme, taught by an assistant professor from Chulalongkorn University, has attracted five enthusiastic students, including one journalist member. The once-a-week class has been moved from Thursdays to Mondays because after the Wednesday night seminars, the club staff often clean up until 2 a.m. or later, which makes it hard for them to be all set and ready for Thursday morning activities. "The staff has to sleep sometimes," Manager Brighton said. A few spaces remain for those who would like to sign up for the 10.30 am - noon Thai Class. Tuition for an 8 week course is 1500 baht.

Liz Lu



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Club Highlights : Anand at the FCCT

Photos by Somchai T.

Urbane, witty, frightfully sensible, unusually accessible and more fluent in English than the average New Yorker, Anand Panyarachun is arguably a foreign correspondent's ideal "caretaker" premier....

That was certainly what he proved to be for the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT) on July 1st, when Anand attracted some 507 guests for a night with the Prime Minister at the Napalai Ballroom, Dusit Thani Hotel. Joining Anand at the FCCT function were more than 14 Cabinet members and several high-ranking government officials.

The event was covered live by Thailand's Channel 9 TV, with simultaneous translations into Thai provided by Suthichai Yoon, publisher of The Nation newspaper. CNN, Visnews and CBS cameramen were also on hand, along with a horde of slightly inebriated print journalists (foreign and local) to cover the Prime Minister's after-dinner speech.

Among other topics touched upon, Anand discussed the media itself, which was badly abused along with thousands of anti-government protestors during the tragic events of May 17-20. While condemning the "political manipulation" of the government controlled media, Anand warned, "Dictatorship of the mass media must not be replaced by dictatorship by the media."



Dr Saisuree Chutikul and Yuli Ismartono shake on it.



P.M. Anand and FCCT's Board members.



Bol's Sec-General Staporn Kavitanon happy to have Anand back. Peter Janssen just happy for a free drink.



Mechai Viravaidya did not pass out condoms, not even to Victor Mallet.

Maybe he's met some of our editors.

Anand was no newcomer to the FCCT. He first addressed the club on April 25, 1991, when he described his appointment to the hot seat as "one of the greatest accidents in history." On July 1st he updated his accident career when he joked, "According to conventional wisdom, lightning never strikes the same place twice. Thus, who could believe or predict that another accident of history would befall the same person for the second time in little over a year?"

When asked by a member of the audience whether good accidents come in threes in Thailand, Anand beamed back a smile, and commented, "As far as I'm concerned, it's non-issue at the moment." Too bad. FCCT president Tan Lian Choo was all set to write another invitation to Anand III to come address the club next time round.

Peter Janssen, Correspondent Director of FCCT Publicity



FCCT President Tan Lian Choo, P.M. Anand and Bertil Lintner.

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& AFP's Charles De Nerciat

Warisara Wuthikul - BB



Prime Minister Anand makes his address

Black October, Bloody May

by Paul Wedel & Dr Yuangrat Wedel

The sense of déjà vu is disquieting; the huge crowds demanding democracy; the troops opening fire; the bloody bodies; the King on television appealing for calm; the prime minister stepping down.

The similarities between October 1973 and May 1992 have been the despair of people who lived through both. "When I was 25 I marched along Rachadamnern (Avenue) amid scenes of terrible sacrifice," a former student activist was quoted in Krungthep Turakit Sut Sapada, "Why, when I am 43, do I have to go out to the same place again, for the same reason and see the same things?"

The public sense of political retrogression that accompanied yet another general moving from army commander to prime minister without benefit of election motivated the crowds that demonstrated against Suchinda Kraprayoon. Now perhaps, the sense of horror at seeing the killing once again will motivate a determination to break out from the cycle of authoritarianism and bloodshed.

For many Thais, October 14 is an indelible memory. If outsiders are to understand more fully what has happened and what will happen next, it is helpful to look closely at the parallels and the differences between May '92 and October '73. It is equally important to look at what followed Oct 14 and how that led to another, darker date in Thai history - Oct 6 1976. Since this is written for newcomers as well as old hands, we will go over some well known facts.

The first striking thing about 1973 and 1992 is that the struggle, despite 19 years of tremendous economic and social change in Thailand, is still over the same basic problem - the dominant political role of the military. In 1973, the rallying cry was against the "Three Tyrants" - Prime Minister General Thanom Kittikachorn, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Gen. Prapat Charusathien and their heir apparent - Col Narong Kittikachorn, son-in-law of Prapat.

Like the triumvirate of of Suchinda, Issarapong Noonpakdee and his brother Chainarong, the three leaders in 1973 threatened not only to dominate government but to extend that domination well into the future. Irritated at the bother of maintaining the facade of civilian democ-



'Daeng' Pornvillai Carr, photographer with Associated Press is pictured being carried away on the morning of May 18th 1992.

racy (and the demands of MPs for a cut of the profits), Thanom overthrew his own Parliament in 1972 and promised a new constitution. It was not a promise he took seriously.

When student leaders and other activists began publicly pressing for the promised constitution, Prapat simply had them arrested. That was the fuse, much like Suchinda's broken promise never to accept the premiership, that led to the explosion. Perhaps Thai leaders will begin to realize that the people seem to take political promises seriously, even if the leaders don't.

Although Thailand has had 15 constitutions, people also take them seriously. Constitutional controversy was at the heart of both crises. Perhaps, more accurately, it is the people's hope that somehow a constitution can restrain the military that makes them so important.

When Suchinda went on television to claim the Communist party was behind the demonstrations, he was taking a leaf out of the Prapat-Thanom book. While Suchinda's allegations brought amused laughter, the communist label in 1973 had more than a surface plausibility. In fact,

according to numerous interviews we did for our book "Radical Thought, Thai Mind", the Communist party never really took advantage of its opportunity in 1973. Although many of the student leaders were influenced by Marxist thought and some later joined the Communist insurgency, at the time of the October uprising they had little contact with the party. The party itself made little effort to recruit them because Maoist theory dictated that the revolution came from the countryside, not the cities.

Although huge demonstrations took place in both 1973 and 1992, the path to violence was quite different. The students in 1973 had actually won their rather limited objectives before the violence broke out. Those arrested were released and student leaders were given assurances by the King that a new constitution would be drafted quickly, leading the way back to elected government. Lack of coordination and perhaps some wilful misunderstanding between the students negotiating with the government and those leading the crowds, kept the protest going despite having achieved its objectives. Then poor crowd handling by police started the scuffles that escalated into full scale riots.

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Morning of May 18th, confrontation at Phan Faa Bridge

Unlike in 1992, there seems to have been no deliberate plan to crush the protests by force. And of course in 1992, Suchinda stubbornly refused to give in to the demands.

Most importantly, the victory of the 1973 protestors was brought about by a split in the military. Even at the height of the fighting, the military rulers were able to muster only a few hundred troops. Then Army Commander-in-Chief, General Krit Srivara, blocked Narong's efforts to bring in loyal soldiers from Lopburi. The Airforce also refused to join in the suppression. The Navy followed orders to move in troops, but the men refused to join the battle. On the side of the protestors, a tough core of vocational students used hand grenades, pistols and molotov cocktails in the street battles. In one remarkable bit of ingenuity, they filled a captured firetruck with gasoline instead of water and used it to raze a police station.

The violence in 1992 appears to have been far more one sided. There are reports that some of the violence, such as the burning of police cars, might have been carried out by military agents provocateurs. Those involved in actively fighting back against the military were a small minority. Most of the protestors were non-violent. Because the protests occurred during school vacation, there were far fewer students in Bangkok. Unlike the almost entirely youthful crowds in 1973, the latest protests encompassed a wide range of ages

While the 1973 uprising unexpectedly achieved far more than its original aims, the 1992 political struggle has been more difficult and protracted. In 1973, the three top leaders were out of the country in a day and the King had named an interim Prime Minister, Sanya Thammasak. Now there is again an interim prime minister who must deal with the dangers of continued power of Class 5.

The quick and seemingly complete victory of the student revolution in 1973, led to fatal mistakes. The quick and easy collapse of the military regime fostered the illusion that anything could be accomplished with big demonstrations and rousing speeches. It launched Thailand into an era of protest and counter-protest - politics in the streets.



Peaceful demonstrations prior to the disturbances.

and incomes. The newspaper sobriquets - "the mobile phone mob" and the "automobile mob" - reflected the unusual presence of the middle class at the front lines of political action.

Wishful rumours to the contrary, there is little hard evidence of a major overt split in the military as in 1973. Certainly, the Army Commander-in-Chief did not desert his brother-in-law. Unlike in 1973, the military officers unhappy with the military prime minister were unable to act because Class 5 and their allies in Class 11 and 12 held most of the key commands.

General public support for the students in overthrowing the military regime gave the impression that the people were ready for rapid political and social change desired by many students. In fact, people were annoyed by economic problems including rice shortages and inflation. They were tired of the three top leaders and wanted a change at the top to bring more democracy. There was little support, however, for the quick transition to socialism that many student leaders wanted.

The "pro-democracy movement" exhibited a wide range of ideologies, but

most of the leaders felt that Marxism, even if only half understood, gave them an effective critique of Thailand's reactionary social and economic system.

"It is necessary to study the revolutionary ideas of Marxism-Leninism in order to use them as weapons," student leader Thirayut Boonmee wrote in a book published in 1976.

When the plans of the students became clearer, the middle class, fearful of rapid change and worried by the increasing violence, swung its support to the right.

The students themselves were badly divided. Seksan Prasertkun, the Thammasat student who had led the massive crowd, split off from other leaders to form his own organisation. Other student and leftist groups sprang up, sometimes more concerned with criticising each other than with working together for change.



Scenes of mourning, Democracy monument 24th May

A series of weak coalition governments led by MR Kukrit Pramoj and his brother (but political adversary) MR Seni Pramoj, were unable to halt the violence. Kukrit himself was powerless to stop a mob of disgruntled policemen who ransacked his lovely Thai style home.

The culmination of the violence came on Oct. 6 1976 when the return of Thanom sparked student protests. The students, however, were so cowed by the rising tide of violence that they held their demonstrations behind the closed gates of Thammasat University. They were right to be afraid. Military radio, rightwing organisations and some newspapers whipped up hatred against the students. A photograph of one student political skit was apparently retouched to make it seem the students were attacking the Crown Prince. This was the final spark.

Police, Red Guards, Village Scouts and some paramilitary troops attacked the University. Dozens of students were brutally murdered. One faction of the military, learning that other factions were planning a coup, seized power. The new government brought in an era of political repression: book burning, arrests and censorship that made even the era of the "Three Tyrants" seem benevolent.

Could it all happen again? The sad record of 1973-76 should serve at least as a warning. Much has still to unfold, but it is possible to note several positive signs:



Troops pull of Sanam Luang, 9.00am, 21st of May

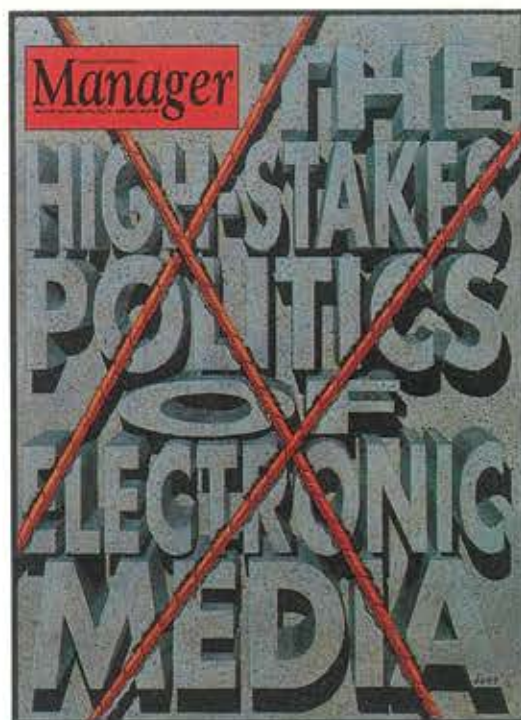
"Fighting to get rid of political oppression is like freeing a group of birds from their cage," Seksan wrote later. But it must have been dismaying to see the birds fly in so many different directions.

Most dangerously, the vocational students who had done much of the fighting and most of the dying on Oct 14, felt slighted by their University colleagues. Many were later wooed into right-wing organisations such as "Red Gaur", led by Col. Sudsai Hasdin. Other right-wing military men organised groups such as the "Village Scouts" or "Nawaphon."

These groups played a key role in the political violence that escalated from 1974 to 1976. There was a calculated campaign of assassination that targeted farmer's leaders, labour unionists and leftist politicians.

Gunmen pulled up alongside the car of Socialist party leader Vr. Boonsanong Punyodhayana and shot him through the head. Dozens of farmer organisation leaders were killed. A bomb blew up the headquarters of a leftist student group. Unsurprisingly, police failed to make any arrests.

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- the opposition to military rule is more widespread among all classes
- the pro-democracy groups suffer from much less ideological division
- the military is blamed for damaging a thriving economy
- the economy itself is now far more vulnerable to political disruption than 19 years ago when it was largely agricultural
- the top military leaders appear to have lost whatever public respect they have had
- military attempts to brand the opposition as communists have failed
- modern communications, whether mobile phones or satellite television, has made it more difficult for a repressive government to hide its actions.

At the same time, however, the public uprising has had less immediate success than in 1973. The top military leaders are still in power, apparently determined to resist the pressure to remove them. So, as before, there is no assurance the bloodshed is over.



Royal Emissaries visit injured,
Siriraj Hospital

Paul Wedel and his wife Yuangrat co-authored the book "Radical Thought, Thai Mind" Paul was formerly based in Bangkok as the UPI Bureau Chief. He now works for the PacRim Group in Singapore.



Christ Church - Bangkok

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A Night at the Royal

by Dominic Faulder

At about 5.30 am on Tuesday 19 May, steel helmeted infantrymen brandishing M-16s were flushing out the Royal Hotel. The place was a tourist's ultimate nightmare: four-hundred per cent occupancy and a compulsory dawn checkout.....

A couple of dozen journalists - Australian, Thai, European, Japanese, American - provided a dishevelled captive audience. They had been rounded up and ordered to sit on the faded carpet of the first floor landing. Right before their eyes, hundreds of demonstrators were being roughly herded down into the world's most infamous hotel lobby.

Men were stripped to the waist and holding shirts on top of their heads with both hands. Many were kicked, then forced to crawl and cringe across the landing. They disappeared from the journalists' sight down the last semi-circular sweep of staircase, and as often as not the oddly plastic rattle of a rifle butt meeting a young skull could be heard. A sickly, middle-aged man was indiscriminantly kicked in the solar plexus as he was expressed from a room bursting with panic-stricken people. More sinisterly, intermittent shots were coming from behind the hotel for at least 10 minutes after the great roar of the onslaught had subsided.

The soldiers were for the most part older, seasoned men. The crude brutality of some distracted from their grim underlying discipline as they set about the task of clearing the hotel floor by floor, instilling maximum fear in their cowering, unarmed quarry. People were walked and stamped on, punched, kicked, struck with rifles and pulled by the hair; doors were smashed, but no shots were fired inside the building. The soldiers were angry, cursing and ugly, but not out of control. There were no bayonetings, rapes, hangings or people falling out of windows. These may not have been the Red Gaur's running amok at Thammasat University in October 1976, but such a spectacle was appalling enough nearly sixteen years on.

The same sort of military discipline had been discernible at about 2.00 am when another sustained barrage suddenly subsided as officers blew whistles in the darkness. Two days earlier, during the peaceful rally at Sanam Luang, it had been unthinkable that there would even be shooting. How quickly things had changed. Whatever mayhem was being wrought early that Tuesday morning, it was no accident. The three hours before dawn had been



Scenes outside the Royal Hotel, dawn May 19

regularly fractured by bursts of light automatic fire, occasionally punctuated by the more ponderous thumping of a heavy machine gun. The thunder of gunfire heralding the storming of the hotel erupted at exactly 5.00 am and rolled implacably along Rajadamnoern, an awesome concert of sheer menace. Defy it and die.

An elderly European gentleman emerged from his room in a silk dressing gown. In a manner worthy of Noel Coward, he picked his way through the terror and

chaos on the landing to a friend's door. A light knock won him the admission that moments before two bangs with a rifle had failed to obtain. The night had thrown up many other absurd scenes. Journalists had been running in all directions when two young members of the hotel's staff arrived, apparently to check the mini bar of Agence France-Presse. Later, when firing resumed, the same room was deliberately plunged into darkness to prevent the lighted balcony attracting attention. A large Belgian

LAST CASUALTIES

The last press casualties in May's bloody days occurred not on Rajdamnorn Avenue but Patpong Road. Fatigued, angered and morally depressed, a number of journalists sought Patpong's solace after the height of the street demonstrations.

Richard Vogel, who works for the photo agency Gamma, survived batons, bullets and assorted brutality only to find himself bloodied by a dart when downing a few drinks at one of Patpong's 'Upstairs Establishments.' A graphic description of exactly how this happened is not possible in a magazine of this nature.

One can only assume the young lady who expelled the dart was a newcomer to the exotic show scene and Richard too immersed in Angst to notice he was slumped far too close to her balloon target. Eyewitnesses report the dart grazed his head and drew some blood. 'Nuff said.

Victim no.2 was super-straw-weight Aussie photographer, Phil Blenkinsop, who came away unscathed from the Siege of Sleeping Dog Hill and the showdown at Phaan Fah bridge but went down in front of the Safari Bar.

"Let them all die," yelled a Britisher when he saw Phil and the others wearing black arm patches in mourning for victims of street violence. Phil offered a swatch of black to the Brit who later smashed a fist into Phil's nose as he stepped out the Safari door.

Phil suffered a broken snoz but otherwise won the day thanks to the Safari Bar manager (who happened to have taken part in the demos), a senior police officer (who knew Phil from news assignments) and the Thai courts (which ordered the Pom to pay Phil 20,000 baht in damages).

Reported from the Frontline by Denis Gray, Bangkok Bureau Chief of AP.

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Buses ablaze, Rajadamnoern, 18th May.

freelance slumped against the console between the beds, unwittingly switching on every light in the room plus the television for good measure. Anguished howls erupted from all corners.

The women demonstrators fared a little better next morning. Left fully clothed, they were mostly able to hang on to some last tatters of dignity. A couple were in tears and two others sensibly fainted. By the time the journalists were finally allowed downstairs, the women were all out of sight and only the men remained outside. Over a thousand were down on their haunches in the cold dawn light, hands securely bound behind their backs with shirts, heads bowed. The fearless souls of the night before seemed to have been reduced to so much plucked poultry awaiting a giant oven.

The forlorn scenes at the Royal that grey dawn contrasted sharply with the drama and heroism of the night before. Outside, along Rajadamnoern Road, a huge and overwhelmingly peaceable crowd had sat its ground, drumming and chanting to a steady beat. At about 10.30, a heavy barrage fired mostly in the air failed to intimidate them. Jubilation erupted as the guns fell silent, but then it became apparent that some shots had found marks. Wounded and dying were ferried into a scene of macabre chaos. Teams of doctors struggled in the hotel's bloodied marble lobby to

Funeral of 13 year old boy who broke his neck whilst falling out of a tree during the disturbances.

cope until valiant ambulance teams arrived to wild applause.

By 2.00 am, an exhausted young doctor from Siriraj Hospital estimated that five people were dead in the lobby, at least five more would not have made it alive to hospital and some 100 others had been wounded. The latter included three tourists shot within yards of the hotel. Two had made the mistake of coming to hear opposition leader Chamlong Srimuang speak, unaware that he had been arrested during the afternoon. The third, young Laurent Opportune of St Tropez, was seizing an unrepeatable chance to burst upon the world of photojournalism. Blazing flashes from his camera, he was rather inopportunistly

shot in the leg.

As the night wore on, the crowd outside began to seep away leaving a militant core whose increasingly anarchic tactics were of the kind that give pro-democracy movements a bad name. Elsewhere in the city, traffic lights and police booths were being smashed. Hijacked buses used to ram the military barricades had been set across Rajadamnoern and torched. The old Public Relations Department car park over the road was emptied and more blazes sparked. Terrifyingly, a petrol tanker was pushed past the hotel and ignited. Hijacked from the other side of town, here was the great equalizer to throw in against overwhelming military armour.

The utterly devastating anticipated explosion sent people scurrying for the furthest point removed in the hotel, but the feared big bang mercifully never came. There had been other scenes of panic just before midnight when smoke from the streets filtered in and set off the fire alarm sending people scrambling down fire escapes. Further apprehension was fuelled by a rumour that all power to the hotel would be cut.

Deep in the night, the old Public Relations Department over the road and other government buildings nearby finally went up in spectacular blazes kindled by diligent firebugs well before midnight. The fires illuminated relative lulls before the troops finally stormed in. By then, the excesses of a militant few had left some observers feeling pretty depressed, not least for playing into the hands of hard-liners.



Warisara Wuthikul - Bureau Bangkok



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But that may well have been the objective. The most extreme acts were not the work of peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators drawn from the ranks of an emerging middle-class, but something organized from far darker strands. The same dichotomy had clearly emerged on the night before during the confrontations around Phan Faa Bridge.

Rajadamnoern that morning was a stilled battlefield as the fire brigade dutifully hosed down the smouldering hulks of government buildings. The ground was strewn with debris and razor wire; thousands of tickets were littered everywhere like confetti from a crazy wedding. An overturned BMW was recognizable by its alloy wheels. Aluminium panels on gutted government Land Rovers had melted. Bullet holes flecked the windscreen of a red and cream BMTA bus, and wisps of smoke slipped from its charred wheel arches. The dreaded tanker had come to rest against a lamp post. Another tanker, this one white, was sitting on the opposite side of the road looking wrecked but far more benign in the quiet of day. Bullet pocks and holes in walls and steel shutters, and three patches



Warisara Wuthikul R.B.

of blood on the hotel side of the road were testimony to the previous night's carnage.

In the shadow of the hotel, scores of exhausted soldiers lolled on the pavement, helmets off. An officer and half a dozen men suddenly turned on photographers. Films not safely squirreled away

were pulled from cameras and out of pockets. Any argument was quite futile. By 7.00 am it was time to slip away through a battered city waking to learn of fresh horrors on its killing streets.

Dominic Faulder is the Managing Correspondent of Bureau Bangkok.

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Kabul Shi'ite!!

by Anthony Davis

Food shortages, drunken rages, dangerous driving, desperate evacuees - and that was just the journos! Anthony Davis reports from Kabul '92 with tales of the Afghan hack-pack and other assorted Shi'ites.....

When Shi'ite mujahideen arrived to check in at Kabul's Continental Hotel, it was apparent the newly proclaimed Islamic Republic of Afghanistan would not soon be joining the New World Order.

How ten to fifteen of them, armed with an impressive variety of light and medium weaponry managed to fit into two sections of the revolving door remains even now uncertain. What was very clear was unfamiliarity and impatience with the technology. To volleys of celebratory gunfire and cries of "God is Great!", they struggled vigorously in opposing directions while staff, management and guests watched in fascinated disbelief from the lobby.

If having to use the tradesman's entrance for four days during reconstruction of the main door had been the sole inconvenience occasioned by the Liberation of Kabul, the press corps' lot would have been, if not happy, at least tolerable. But in the Land of a million Kalashnikovs that would have been expecting too much.

Even before the triumphal entry of the mujahideen into Kabul a motley horde of hacks had already descended on the city, mostly from or via New Delhi. By the time the liberators had got down to the serious business of slaughtering each other (and the local populace), the media were flying, driving, riding and even walking in from every quarter of the compass.



Tony Davis

Officers and Gentlemen of the Uzbek Militia Division

At the height of "the disturbances" several hundred journalists, "writers", photographers, cameramen, soundmen, technicians, and assorted camp-followers were in town, doing their best to adjust to the altitude, the firepower and the taxi prices. A day's cab-hire that in January ran at \$15 by early May fetched \$150 - and that without armour plating or guarantees the driver was sufficiently suicidal to go where he was told.

Few of the assembled media personalities knew much about Afghanistan, and many would have preferred not to be there at all. Witnessing an epic watershed in the history of an ancient, landlocked, battle-scarred, war-weary, and starkly beautiful land that is a Crossroads of Central Asia and from which up to 5 million refugees have fled during fourteen years of invasion, foreign occupation and civil war is, after all, not everyone's idea of a working day.

Indeed, even before an outraged Arab Virtue Enforcement Squad closed down the Bamiyan Bar at the Continental, conversation tended to revolve with dismal regularity around "getting out".

The journalistic grind was admittedly an uphill one. Matters of life and death were unpredictable and the politics of the story slippery - even by the tortured standards set by the conflict to date.

The "freedom fighters" - as they were known in simpler times - came in a startling profusion of political prejudice, religious persuasion, race, uniform, and physiognomy. There were Sunni Muslims: pro-Saudi, pro-Pakistani, and even pro-Afghan. There were Shi'ite Muslims:

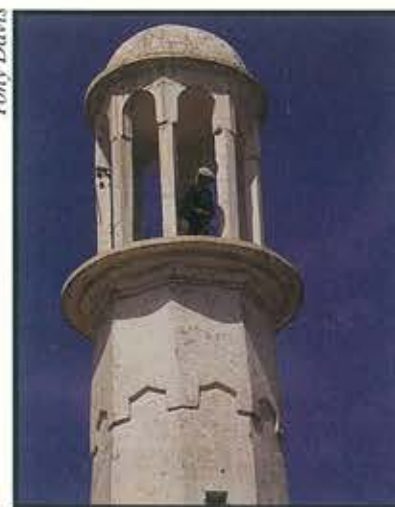
pro-Iranian and vehemently un-pro-Iranian; there were Pushtuns speaking Pashto, and Pashtuns in karakul-hats speaking Farsi; there were Ghilzais and Durrani Pushtuns; Tajiks speaking Persian; and Uzbeks speaking Uzbek; Hazaras saying very little; a few Palestinians; and many Saudis & Other Assorted Arab Brothers.

In was a once-in a decade bash: everyone who was anyone in the fundamentalist ferment was in town. For those whose lap-tops could sort out the muj and their mates, there were then the various branches of the Armed Forces of the Former Regime who joined variegated bands of the Mujahideen Interim Regime depending on their own political, sectarian, or racial prejudices; or, simply, on who was least likely to kill them.

In a category all of their own were the Uzbek Militia, Najibullah's Nemesis. These irregulars are celebrated for both military prowess and their recreational predilections: extortion, loot, rape, pillage, arson, armed assault, robbery and occasionally murder. They were at least easy to recognise and most in fact turned out to be pleasant enough types, which only goes to prove you shouldn't always believe what you read in the press...

Suffice to say, even for hardened graduates of Beirut, it was tricky stuff appreciating the subtler distinctions of faction and sect in a situation that changed rapidly from street to street and hour to hour. In the treacherous back-alleys of revolution Afghan-style, the only constants were that all factions were (a) good Muslims; (b) committed solely to peace and tranquility; and (c) very heavily armed.

Tony Davis



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Getting it right was important, though, as one National Geographic correspondent discovered as he accelerated through one of Kabul's multitudinous checkpoints at a wave from a bearded warrior he fondly thought had recognised him. The wave was in fact a signal to open fire on the jeep and/or another group. His vehicle was decoratively perforated adding to an expense account which, after the same hack was burgled by off duty Uzbeks six times, is likely to strain credibility even at a publication not famous for its tight fistiness.

An Italian cameraman badly wounded in the head might not have been had he only have known that the Uzbek machine-gunner he was filming had been doing stand-up Rambo impersonations for over half an hour in the same spot, attractively silhouetted against the skyline atop a minaret. A radical Pashtun on the receiving end, eventually bored of the unremitting attention and blew both of them away with a rocket. (Amazingly, the Italian was back on his feet within four days and left on the first available flight - clear proof, as the cynics had it, of successful brain surgery. Rambo died on the spot - spectacularly.)

The vicissitudes of street-level reporting might have been bearable had the war not intruded into the sanctum of the hotel.

Staying at the Continental - situated on a hillside above the city with a picturesque view of the mayhem below - is apt to foster a sense of distance and invulnerability. Such illusions were rudely shattered by the arrival of large numbers of noncombat Mujahideen in the cortege of President for Two Months, Sibghatullah "Don't Blink" Mojadidi.

Wearied by the rigours of exile in Peshwar and unsuited to urban jihad, many flocked immediately to the Continental. There they laid siege to the breakfast buffet before most journalists were ever up; carried assault rifles in the coffee-shop; rode up and down in the lift; tore down pictures of Aeroflot airhostesses; and omitted pointedly to pay their bills.

There was a sombre inevitability in the bar being the first casualty of Islamization. But tensions reached breaking point following the revolving door incident when two incensed correspondents attempted to disarm an Ayatollah's bodyguard. Another later tore up his (admittedly extortionate) buffet bill on the

ground that if these ****ing ragheads weren't paying theirs, why the **** should he pay his. Segregated feeding areas were organised the next day.

Getting The Story Out meanwhile assumed nightmare proportions. In Kabul, perhaps only a municipal plumbing system instituted by Akbar the Great has greater antiquarian interest than the communications infrastructure. Telephones exist; but can only be counted on within city limits - provided exchanges have not been sacked or lines torn down. International phone-calls are a rare, indeed almost unheard of event. The term "fax" elicits stares of wondering incomprehension.

The city boasts two public telex machines - one at the Continental, the other at the Kabul Hotel. Museum-pieces both, they functioned intermittently depending on (a) fluctuating supplies of electricity (dependant on who controlled the hydro-electric plants outside Kabul); and (b) whether the telex charge collector had been paid in cash or Black Label.

But if life up at the Continental had one big plus, it was the nightly panorama of Happy Fire, a revolutionary and non-alcoholic version of Happy Hour that began as a rule after evening prayers and lasted for over an hour before merging into the night's normal hostilities. For this brief interlude, the night sky would be prettily illuminated in a kaleidoscope of high-velocity tracer, parachute flares and exploding RPG rounds.

Generally producing no more than ten fatalities a night (what goes up...), Happy Fire was a two-pronged affair. It served both as a reminder to a grateful populace of the festive nature of Liberation; and, as



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importantly, of the fact that in Kabul nobody is counting on running out of ammunition any time soon....

Anthony Davis is a Bangkok-based freelancer who specializes in West Asia. He was in Kabul on an assignment for TIME magazine.

Tony Davis



Happiness is Kalashnikov shaped

Weird Stories

by Christopher G. Moore

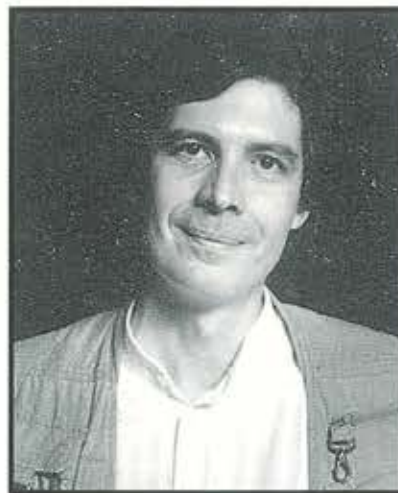
A BBC commentator told FCCT members after they had watched BBC video tapes of the violence in Bangkok that he had covered conflicts in Africa and the sub-continent but those experiences had not served to distill the meaning of events in Bangkok, to paraphrase him, he concluded, "The last week in Bangkok was weird. There was a definite sense of weirdness."

This "weirdness" observation raises questions about storytellers; how they approach stories, frame, process, and shape the narration. For example, was this TV commentator--let us include him as another kind of story teller--saying that conflicts have a standard story line, plots, characters, and beginning, middle and end, and that any deviation or innovation from the fixed practice which lead to death in the streets is "weird"? The word weird or weirdness is an important marker in metaphor failure. We were all part of that story; and as story tellers we like stories about ourselves. Three classes of story tellers watched the Visnews and BBC video replays of the violence and listened to the commentary afterwards.

Journalists who live and work in Bangkok for dailies normally tell stories running about 800 words; those working on weeklies or monthlies, or for radio or TV, might have the luxury of double that amount. Freelancers send out 800 words, a cheque comes back in the post--well, most of the time.

The business executives, embassy staff, NGOs, and professional counsellors (including many people with years of experience in Thailand) wrote their stories in reports, newsletters, and memoranda, sent them to each other and to their superiors inside and outside of the country. These FCCT story tellers--the envy of all other members--receive a monthly pay cheque and sometimes special allowances and this happens even though their stories are used or not, believed or not, filed or thrown away.

The previous two classes share a perception about a small minority of members, the third-class club members who write stories in the form of books, short-stories, or screenplays. This group is neither paid for every 800 words each day and week they work nor by the month; but you



say, they don't do it just for the money. A couple of writers make a killing; but most do not. There are other considerations beyond money, you say. These writers are "real" story tellers because they have freedom to be creative. The idol of our time is this God of creativity - originality, and achieving fame in their service is the whispered prayer. In *Consciousness Explained* (1991) Dr Daniel C. Dennet suggests that our internal narrative or story making brain software writes us. Our stories create ourselves; not selves that create stories.

The American writer Paul Fussell said about facing unpleasant facts, "that life is short and almost always ends messily; that if you live in the actual world you can't have your own way; that if you do get what you want, it turns out not to be the thing you wanted; that no one thinks as well of you as you do of yourself; and that one or two generations from now you will be forgotten entirely and that the world will go on as if you never existed."

"Forgotten," Fussell says. An ugly word. This fear of extinction runs deep and money and position and rank can only distract one from this dread for so long. The hidden fallacy, though, is that having ones story last means the self survives. To use Dennet's argument, it is the story which wishes to survive, creates a self, teaches the self language, and our brains make us the perfect host animal. But that is a different discussion. What sets the third-class (like the third-hand) apart is the freedom; one way they reveal themselves is through metaphors. Roger Penrose and Stephen Hawking invented the metaphor of a "blackhole" and allowed us to visualize an

aspect of the universe. Artists like Escher created visual metaphors as in *Ascending and Descending* and *Waterfall*. Here are a few hints for gathering story telling materials and metaphors to root out weirdness and achieving, if not immortality, three or four generations of remembrance as your name is attached to a metaphor.

All messages should be observed, noted, recorded. Because the overlapping static mix of messages or multiple frequencies is the life-blood of the characters and story. The fears, worries, and doubts about the human condition are written everywhere you go, pick up a newspaper, menu, open a brochure, and it is on your clothes and almost every thing you carry in your pockets.

Menus--last year in Saigon I had dinner at a restaurant which had a menu entry: "Eels cooked with spies." I tried to buy the menu but they refused to sell one even though I offered a lot of money. I tried to explain the irony of the menu which had misspelt spies and used the word spies in its place. The manager saw no irony. She saw someone who wished to steal a state secret. Run to Bangkok, open a Third-Hand restaurant, and serve up eels cooked with spies.

Publisher's Blurb--From the 1991 Hodder & Stoughton New Books List, "Thai in a Week": "The latest in this series of comprehensive, accessible courses designed to break the language barrier in a week." Having mastered Thai in a week, turn to "Windsurfing in a Week", followed by "Golf in a Week", and polish off "Squash in a Week."

Labels--On men's underwear: Double Goose Briefs and jockstraps: Superdog brand. So you build the picture of our windsurfer with his book "Windsurfing in a Week" gaining confidence by wearing a jock-strap with a strong, large, alert Superdog on the front, seated at the Third-Hand Restaurant, eating a plate of eels cooked with spies.

Product Advertising copy--Sanyo ad. for its 8 mm camcorder with fuzzy logic technology: "So anyone can record the world as they see it, beautifully, quickly and without mistakes." Here is the brave new world--this time from a Japanese based company--promising everyone who buys their technology that they will be empowered to record the world quickly without mistakes. Why would anyone wish

to write or read a book in such a world--When you can record your own vision of beauty. A 8 mm camcorder at Sanam Luang--an instrument which records without mistakes. Why didn't the BBC, CNN, NHK, Visnews and the others have Sanyos?

Dead writer's mail--this passage from a letter by Rilke dated April 29, 1904: "What must fall away, falls away; what belongs to us remains with us, for everything proceeds according to laws that are beyond our insight and with which we are only apparently at variance."

Personal Health advertisements--This is an ad from a health clinic in Bangkok: Youth That Money Can Buy. Attention: Gentlemen. Are you interested in prolonging your sexual youth? Do you feel that your health is deteriorating? Friends said that they do not have the same problems, so what is the problem with me? Call us for an appointment, we might be the answer that you have been searching for. Do not deprive yourself of this opportunity to realize your dream.

Thai Language Metaphors--

Examine the basic Thai vocabulary of "heart", "face", and "shit". *Jai damn* or red face is a person who blushes over an incident or story (maybe the one you wish to tell). *Nah damn, nah daeng* or black and red face is a person with a strained face, and under this expression is a feeling that something has happened to cause his or her world to collapse. *Kii lui* or shit saw (as in a "carpenter's saw") describes a very stupid person.

Step one: review and decode such messages and practice constructing metaphors. The deeper your awareness about language --the range, uses, manipulations, and misunderstandings--the easier it becomes to "see" the warps and distortions language leaves like rings inside the redwood tree trunk of our shared experiences. Books are like one such ring etched in the trunk of one redwood in the forest of our species, the planet is another ring in the forest of the galaxy, and the galaxy itself is another ring in the forest of the universe. Why this knowledge of the "rings" stops no writer is itself a mystery, something "weird" suggesting words program us to believe we can become "Lord of the Rings."

Step two: assemble the linguistic and image threads, and knit them into the fabric of how people live, hope, fear, want, trust, fight, and die. Write one page a day for 365 days and you will have a book in a year. Call it *Weird Ringing in Bangkok*. Label the book fiction or non-fiction, or both.

Step three: consciously tell a story and consciously stay out of the way of the story you are telling.

Step four: set yourself a goal of putting one word after another, building metaphor like births and deaths, then explain, describe, propose, and question experience and events inside a narrative that rings true and entertains. And next time the BBC sends someone to Bangkok for a week to cover a breaking Bangkok news story, we might invite him to participate on a Wednesday night panel with the topic--*The Weirdness of Story Telling and Story Tellers*.

Christopher G. Moore is the Bangkok-based author of *A Killing Smile*, *A Bewitching Smile*, *Spirit House*, *Enemies of Memory*, *His Lordship's Arsenal* and *Heart Talk*.



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Steve Watkins
(left) of
the Australian
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Robert
Andrews,
"Retired and
proud of it!"



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John Byers and P. Yale sample the
FCCT's famous beer.



Zhan Jun Li and spouse, correspondent
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"Exhausted Marine" shot by Eddie Adams using KODAK
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"Lion New Zealand" shot by Jose Azel using KODAK
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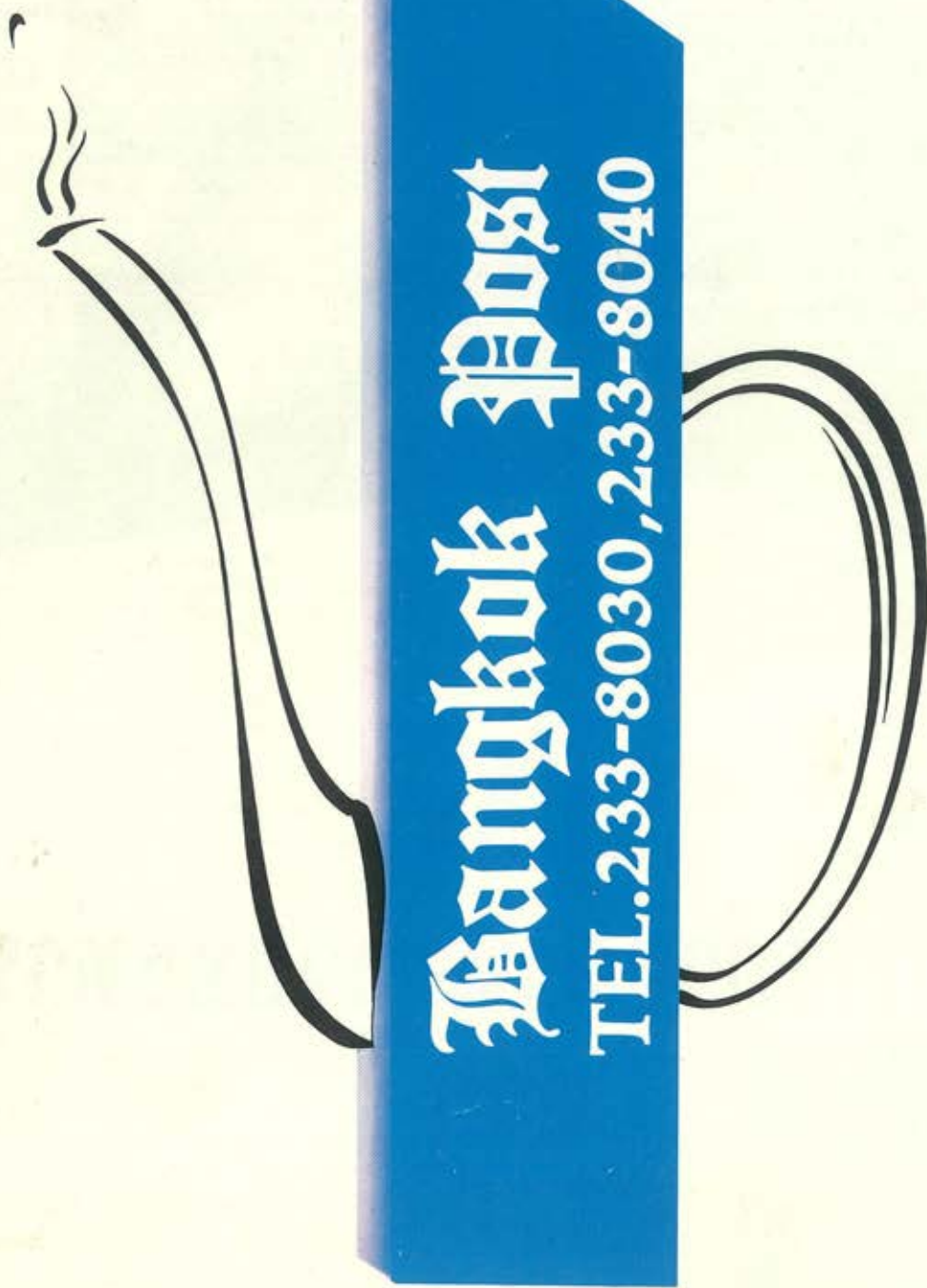
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