

DATELINE

BANGKOK

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF THAILAND MAGAZINE FOURTH QUARTER 2003



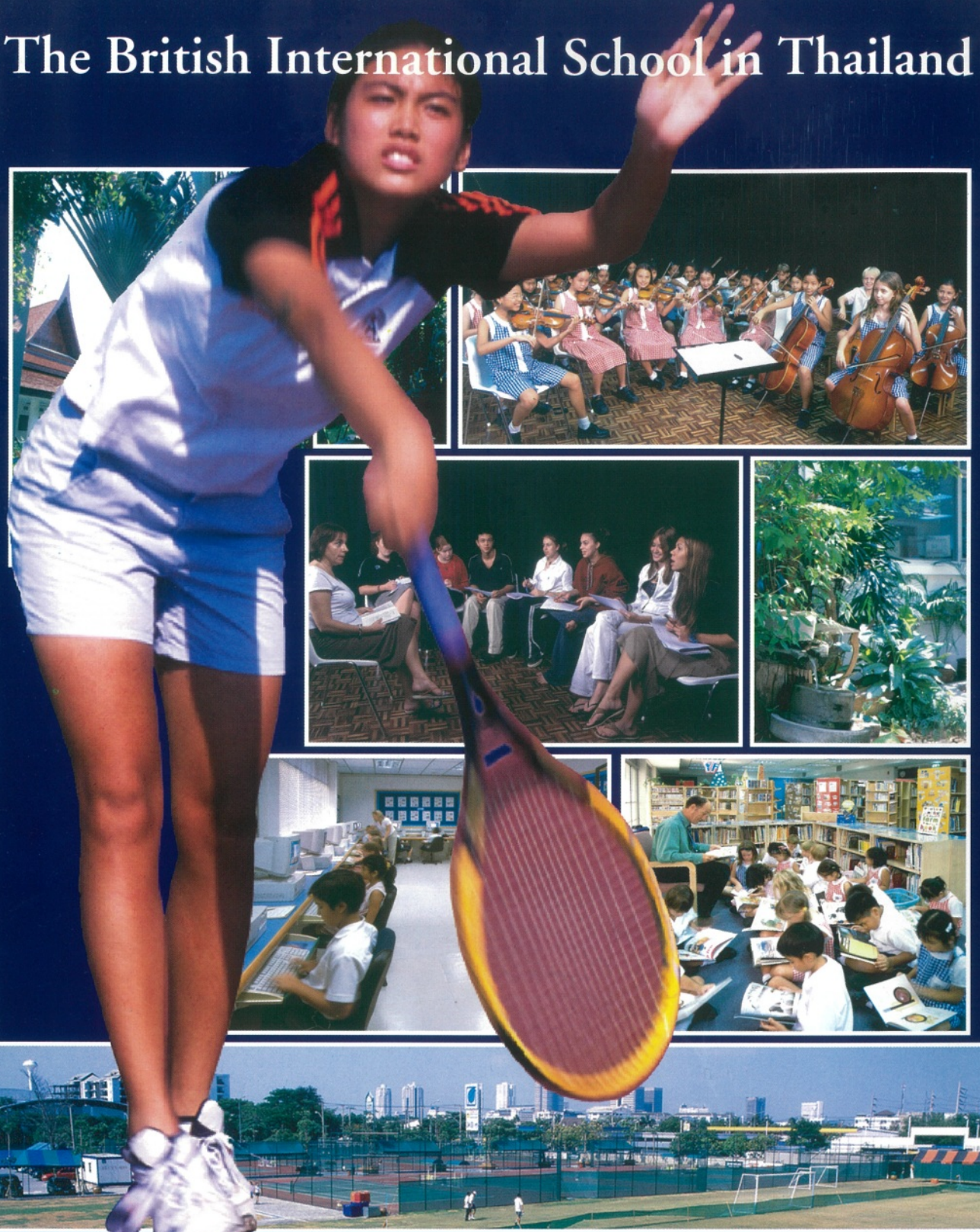
Peace Talks ...

Cuba Calling

Reporters' Retreats

Hidden Wars Revisited

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Photo data:
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 Exposure mode: manual
 Focus mode: manual
 Resolution: HI: 1,512 x 2,268

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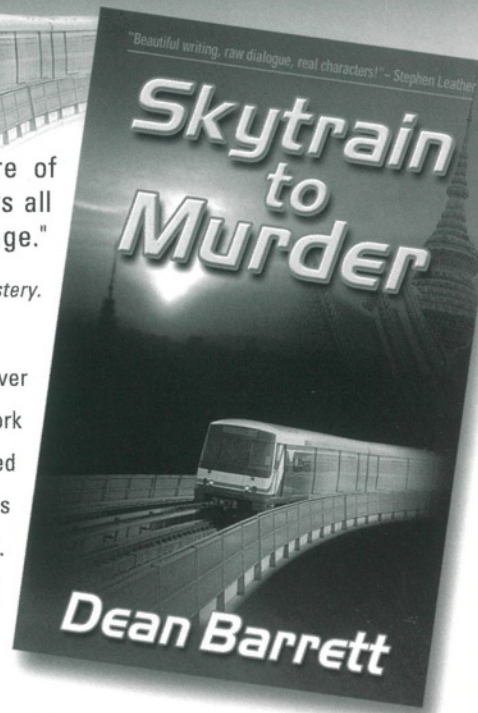
Skytrain to Murder

by Dean Barrett

"Skytrain to Murder, a noirish mystery steeped in the culture of Thailand, skillfully portrays expatriate life in Asia. Barrett conveys all this with a sure-penned elan that pulls us nonstop from page to page."

- G. Miki Hayden, author and Macavity winner, Writing the Mystery.

Running low on funds, ex-CIA agent Scott Sterling moves into an apartment over a Bangkok bar. He teaches scuba diving and does occasional investigative work usually involving missing bargirls or wayward spouses. But he is soon involved in tracking a murderer through Bangkok's little known world of upper-class gentlemen's clubs, houses of domination and kinky expatriate orgies. Meanwhile, with the help of his muay-Thai trained girlfriend, he attempts to rescue a young girl from thugs in a slum. All the while knowing that his girlfriend might in fact be the murderer.....



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FEEDING THE MACHINE

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

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A Successful Year

Overall, 2003 was a good year for the Club. A year of good programmes, higher income and more members. It was also a challenging year, with the government breathing down our necks to cancel press conferences and putting pressure on potential guest speakers not to come to the FCCT.

The board worked hard to stay on top of current events with considerable success. Our programme on SARS, Burma, Iraq, North Korea, the violence in Thailand's south, the property market, the economy, and press freedom were timely and often made headlines in Thailand and beyond. Guest speakers included Thailand's foreign, justice, finance and commerce ministers plus, of course, Prime Minister Thaksin. From abroad we hosted Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Jesse Jackson, and David L. Heymann of the World Health Organisation during the SARS outbreak, along with Nobel Prize laureates, ambassadors and many senior business figures. Thanks here belongs to Jeanne Hallacy and Dan Lovering whose efforts and patience made the

programmes possible.

Despite a shortage of contributions, *Dateline* magazine kept rolling in, along with a new directory, the weekly bulletin and a brilliant feature on the Club, prominently displayed in the *Bangkok Post*. The publicity won us new members, the stories in *Dateline* were informative, funny and controversial and Craig Knowles and Vaudine England rarely complained about the thankless job of keeping members informed through our publications. Big thanks to them and to Henry Silverman who is helping out with the Bulletin.

Membership is on the rise. We now have more than 700 members compared with around 600 at the start of 2003 through the efforts of Karen Emmons and Marc Laban.

Nopporn Wong-Anan and Laurent Malespine helped out with programmes and Kid Choudhury gave us Friday night special dishes. Amal Naj brought in precious sponsorship revenue along with Julian Spindler, who also kept us from spending it all. Julian was also the man to turn to for advice on deli-

cate Club matters and his advice always proved to be the best. Former President Rodney Tasker added weight to the board with his years of experience.

But the biggest thanks belongs to former and present Club Managers Khun Noi and Khun Leng and our staff for keeping the FCCT going. They deserve our appreciation for coping with a much bigger work load last year.

The FCCT is looking forward to a successful 2004. Good programmes are already in place, we have signed a contract with a new food provider and the focus will be on upgrading the facilities of the clubhouse. I urge you all to get actively involved this year in the Club's membership, publicity, programmes and other committees to ensure that the FCCT remains the one venue in Southeast Asia where freedom of expression is fully practised.

For me, it has been a rewarding year and I thank you all for your trust and support.



Costas Paris

Stop Press—New Year, New Menu...

The FCCT board is pleased to announce we have enlisted the services of Khun Chalor Noypun, cooking supervisor at Bangkok's popular Anna's Café restaurants, to oversee our new menu.

Since opening the first of its restaurants in Soi Saladaeng four years ago, Anna's Cafés have proven popular among Thais and Expats alike. Anna's also has branches on Rama IV, Wireless Rd, Sukhumvit and Rama III. It has even ventured abroad, opening a branch in Sydney's trendy Darlinghurst district.

Khun Chalor and his team will offer the standard Thai favourites – pad thai, fried rice, green chicken curry – along with a few more

exotic dishes including panfried Chinese kale with shitake mushrooms in oyster sauce, the highly popular yum pla dook foo (deep fried catfish salad) and soft crab in sweet and sour sauce.

For the chilli-challenged, the new menu also includes stock farang fare such as burgers, sandwiches, salads and fries.

All of the dishes on the new menu are very reasonably priced. The cheaper meals are between 50 and 70 Baht, and no dish will set you back more than 100 Baht.

Khun Chalor's team will also provide buffet menus for the Club's programme nights.

We welcome the new team aboard.





h What a Night!

Photos by Mick Elmore

Christmas Party, attended, was the better bashes of the delegations the night - it wasn't - entertainment act with more than 100 guests at the Royal on December 20. Special thanks to Crawford, who threw a bonanza of prizes. The big winner was Vaudine who won in way more than for the Club. She scored two prizes - her other prizes were Airways Inter-Club's triumphs and tragedies,

Thank the following for the evening

; Kanary Bay, Hotel, Phuket; M, Hua Hin; Koh Samui; Golden Tri-Unity Hotel; Best Novotel, Siam Hotel; JW Mar-rawan; Ori-ent; Dusit Thani Hotel; Evergreen Hotel; Penin-sula's Park Hotel; Carbon Street;



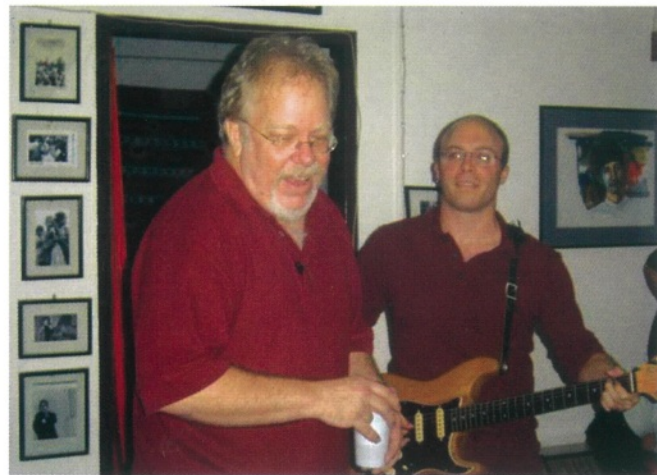


Alex Spilius and Marc Laban

Photo by Derek Williams



President Paris and the Boys grasping for news
Photo by Murray Wray



Lin Neumann jams with Dan Lovering at Jeanne Hallacy's Xmas Party
Photo by Jennifer Gampell



FCCT Golf Hackers at large

Covering APEC



I have a confession to make: I love my job. Most journalists would probably say the same thing, but not necessarily right after covering the APEC summit in Bangkok. Not me. I may stand alone in declaring I had a fantastic time, and with good reason – I didn't have to do anything.

Not that I sat in the cafeteria the whole time. I just couldn't miss Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's post-summit press conference. The outgoing premier and his apologists went to great lengths insisting his infamous "Jews run the world" speech just before APEC was taken out of context. Having

watched the speech on television during the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Kuala Lumpur, I might have agreed.

But then Mahathir asserted during his APEC press conference that the furore over his comments only proved that Jews did in fact run the world. It was one of the few moments during APEC where I had to think a little bit. OK, he says his comments were taken out of context, but in fact Jews do rule the world? Maybe it's best that he retired.

If I was confused and repulsed by Mahathir, I felt only pity for Ricardo Lagos, the president of Chile, and host of the next APEC summit. Not only

did Lagos have to give his press conference right before the controversial Mahathir, he did it in front of a crowd created only by the need to arrive early for Mahathir. Most of the press corps weren't interested in the next summit.

But in Bangkok, free beers or no free beers, I had it pretty good. Foot massages, free newspapers and Internet and, best of all, no deadlines. Surviving the set-piece, enlivened only by bomb-watching, takes detachment.

— Joe Cochrane, *Newsweek*

SOI WHISPERS

BBC fans could have been forgiven recently for thinking its new Bangkok correspondent was moonlighting as an international pop superstar, when a usually meticulous anchor back-announced one of her stories with "That report from Kylie Minogue." For the record it's **Kylie Morris**. ● Speaking of show business, which former Club president is popping up on the silver screen in the much talked about "Siam Renaissance", featured recently in the Bangkok International Film Festival? He was also spotted heading for a certain riverside hotel premier looking very debonair. ● And still on the river, a high-rise condo block is quickly gaining a reputation as journo central. SBS Australia's **Ginny Stein** lives there, as does *Dateline* editor **Craig Knowles**. Now the head of AP's Asia Desk **Geoff Spencer** and wife **Julie** are set to move in, joining an assortment of *Bangkok Post* types and various freelancers. Could the adjacent Yok Yor marina become the new hack's hangout? ● Bangkok Beware! We hear on the grapevine that a certain Australian party gal – we're not naming her except to say she's a Barry sister – is set for a temporary move back to the Mango. Very good news indeed. ● And speaking of comebacks, we are also delighted that **Kate Gunn**, formerly of ABC Australia, has had enough of Sydney and will be back in Thailand real soon, basing herself in Chiang Mai. ● More from Down Under: The Sydney Morning Herald/Age is moving its Southeast Asian base back to Bangkok. A correspondent who was being considered is now no longer on the list after running off with another correspondent from a different Oz organisation. The new correspondent will begin in July. While it is yet to be formally announced, we can tell you it's a woman, and our Sydney spies tell Soi Whispers she is "down to earth, and a lot of fun." ● Amid the welcomes, we bid farewell to **Lin Neumann**, who is leaving Bangkok to take up a posting with The Standard in Hongkers. ● **Thomas Crampton**, who in the past five years or so has worn presidents' hats at both the FCCT and the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club, bid goodbye in fine style, holding a brief get-together at the FCCT, popping the champagne corks and immediately leaving the gathered crowd to drink it while he hot-footed it to the airport for a flight to Geneva. ● Social event of the quarter, not counting the various Christmas parties, belongs to **Steven Pettifor**. He launched his new book "*Flavours – Thai Contemporary Art*" in the gorgeous grounds of Kukrit Pramoj's house recently and followed it up with a gala party at Dbl O, or whatever the old Ministry of Sound is now called. Congratulations Steven. ● Finally Whispers and *Dateline* in general apologizes for this quarter's late edition. We promise to be more punctual in 2004 and wish everyone a happy and prosperous Year of the Monkey.



Peace Talks...

By Craig Knowles, Photos by Kees Metselaar



United States Congressman and former presidential candidate Reverend Jesse Jackson Jr kicked off the FCCT's joint initiative with the International Peace Foundation in November to bring some of the world's most esteemed public speakers to the Club.

More than 300 people packed the clubhouse – our second biggest night of the year after the Prime Minister's address in October – to listen to the Rev. Jackson speak.

Rev. Jackson focused on the United States under the George W. Bush regime, in a highly critical speech and in the Question and Answer session.

He noted the Bush administration had a "closed door policy" and since taking office had not met with either the peace movement or organised labour representatives.

"So it is a profoundly ideological administration," he said.

Rev. Jackson said the United States was in a period of immense transition and change, with millions of dollars now being diverted to the

ongoing military campaign in Iraq.

"Not long ago the big debate in America was what should one do with the peace dividend... (but) what was a trillion and a half dollar surplus is now a five hundred billion dollar deficit.

"This drop from peace dividend and surplus to war budget and deficit is having its impact on the psyche of the American people."

Rev. Jackson is founding president of the Rainbow/Push Coalition, a multiracial, multicultural organisation which campaigns on justice and peace issues.

He said Thailand was the right place to inaugurate a series of Peace Dialogues because of its central location in the Asia-Pacific.

"As Asia becomes one of the world's economic engines, all these issues – be they worker rights, child labour laws, women's rights or environmental protection – are critical to the growing Asia and the growing world," he told the *Bangkok Post*.

"We need a standard rule for workers – an

international law," he added. He acknowledged America's early wealth was made on the back of slavery. But, he argued, propelling economic growth through cheap labour is flawed.

"We have gone through some of those phases. The future of the nation lies not in the labour of children but the education of children.

"The real-term capital is intellectual capital. No nation should try to trade cheap labour and undercut human rights. There is no future there."

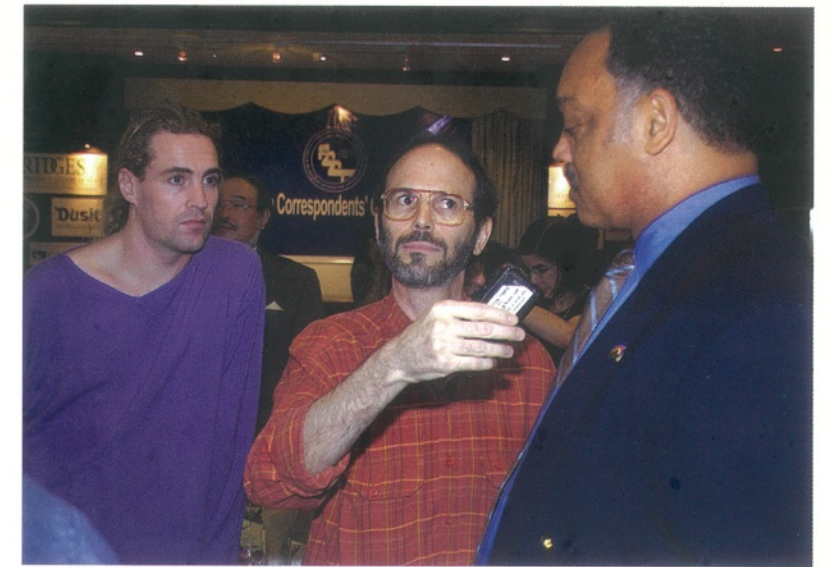
The "Bridges – Dialogues Towards a Culture of Peace" programme is hosted through the International Peace Foundation. It is part of a United Nations' General Assembly initiative to promote peace and non-violence.

At the time of going to print, the club was preparing to host Jose Ramos-Horta, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of East Timor, in what was shaping up as another sell-out evening.

In February, the Club will host Gareth Evans, former Australian foreign minister and now President of the International Crisis Group. Evans played a major role in developing the UN Peace Plan for Cambodia and in founding the APEC Forum.

In March, we hope to host Dame Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop. Promoting corporate social responsibility and respect for human rights, the environment and animal protection, Dame Anita is also the UK Ambassador for British Business.

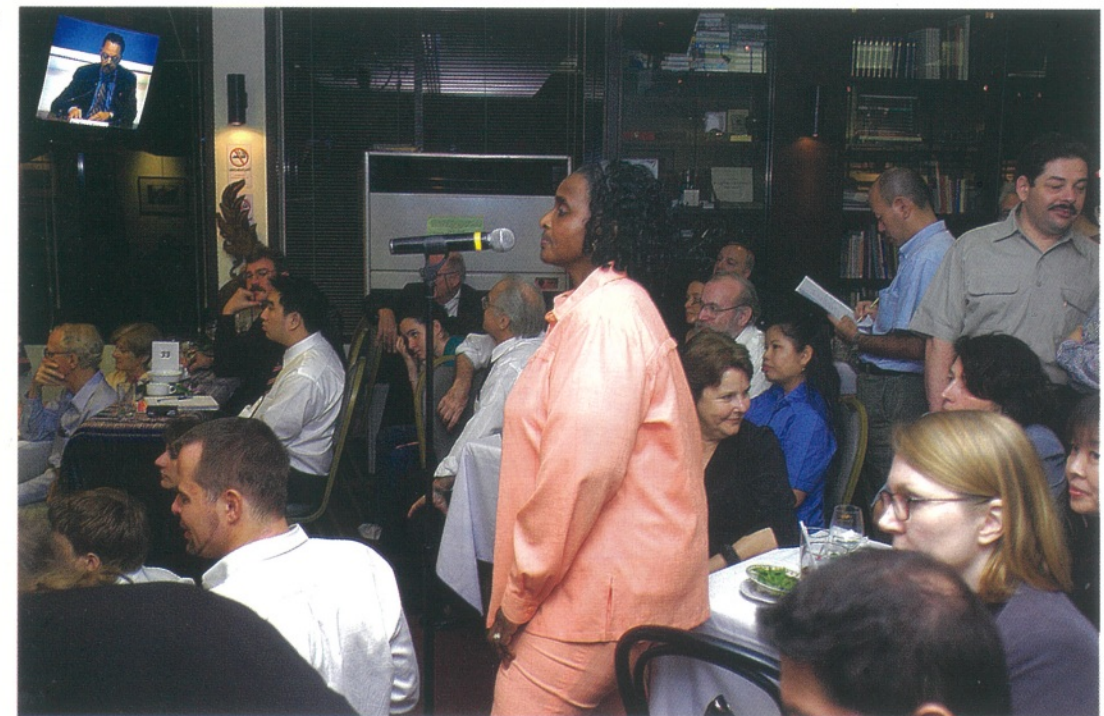
Another major programme in the Bridges series is scheduled for April – Sir Vidia S. Naipaul, the Nobel Laureate for Literature whose



books include "The Mystic Masseur", "A House for Mr. Biswas" and "Beyond Belief", a critical assessment of Muslim fundamentalism in non-Arab countries.

The Bridges programme is being run over a six-month period in partnership with various national and international organisations in Thailand. Chairman of the Thai Advisory Board for the programme, Anand Panyarachun, said the variety of speakers reflects the fact that peace involves all parts of society.

"It involves awareness and social responsibility of politicians, the business community, scientists, artists and the media. And since peace – within ourselves, our families and our environment – starts in our minds and hearts, it involves every one of us," Anand said.



Reporters' Retreats

When **Jan McGirk**, Southeast Asia correspondent for *The Independent*, goes visiting, she likes to stay with friends, sort of.

Discerning hacks in the FCCT might wonder if this article is a shameless plug following some free junkets. Not so. When I heard that a couple of fellow journalists are running island retreats in the region, I became intrigued, even a bit envious, and determined to check out these second homes in Bali and Sri Lanka.

On assignment, most reporters get stuck at either business hotels or noisy dumps, so we deserve relaxed vacations in a real home. There is a risk that if a holiday place is too rustic or remote, the chores mount up and it begins to feel too much like work. These seasoned Asia hacks manage to keep things up to finicky expatriate standards, so the irritations of life in the boondocks are anticipated and mostly eliminated. Both of these private villas are comfy yet exotic, and roomy enough for a group of friends or a family.

Photojournalist John Stanmeyer answers the door to Villa Tandeg wearing a red and white "Osama Don't Surf" tank top, and a woolly Pakhool hat from the Afghan frontier. He resembles one of Bali's fabled magic mushrooms, super sized. As soon as Stanmeyer notices my double take, he is quick to explain his odd get-up: while sitting at the computer in

his air-conditioned home office, the ethnic hat was the first thing at hand to keep his shaved head cozy. The t-shirt is a defiant post-Bali bombing souvenir. Never mind: the vacation house next door is all ready and he's eager to see my reaction to the place where I will chill out for the next eight days.

A shooter from the VII photo agency, Stanmeyer recently relocated his young family and archives from a cramped apartment in Hong Kong to a pair of villas overlooking rice terraces near Seminyak Beach in Bali. In just a few months, he and his wife, Anastasia – who is a freelance writer – have pulled together a tropical retreat for journalists who desire a peaceful haven to ease past writer's block or to recover from a harrowing assignment. She runs the place, while he takes time between assignments to tweak the aesthetics: perfecting the lighting or updating the graphics on the wall. Breeze-ruffled rice shoots provide a soothing green view.

Bali is a nonstop flight from Bangkok, and if you shop around for low-season fares, the cost is equivalent to a weekend flight to Krabi or Chiang Mai. It's usually cheapest if you stop in Singapore. Stanmeyer says he had a sophisticated clientele in mind when he outfitted the guest villa with a DVD player, wireless broadband connection, split air conditioners in both master bedrooms, and one of the best cooks on the coast, but he allows a sloth like me to rent the place by the day, too.

A motley collection of Asian artifacts – from Chinese puppets to an Afghani helmet on the bedstead – make an eclectic backdrop for my languid holiday. Mostly, I read or take moonlight swims in the pool, back-stroking beneath unfamiliar constellations. Sometimes I work up the energy to jog down to the beach. Otherwise I use the villa's mobile phone to call a taxi for the ten minute ride. Monty, a friendly guard dog, patrols the lily pond and the garden. Discreet housekeepers lay out new

The Max Wadiya beach, Sri Lanka



Villa Tandeg, and Photo by John Stanmeyer

floral offerings and incense so each day can be as auspicious as the previous one. One night, the villagers put on a shadow puppet play by torchlight and, when we are summoned to see the spectacle, I am transfixed.

In Bali, of course, sybarites can while away the afternoon in a spa, or else call a masseuse to the villa, and there is no shortage of elegant restaurants or beach side bars to sample. Up a rugged track, Stanmeyer's villa feels like a secret hideaway. For further details on rates and availability, consult his website: <http://www.villatandeg.com/>

Equally idyllic is another journalist's villa with three double bedrooms. Max Wadiya is a two-storey colonial spread that fronts the Indian Ocean in Sri Lanka. Again, there are direct flights from Bangkok to Colombo. The owner is Art Max, a veteran India-hand with the Associated Press, who now is based in Amsterdam. Ruth, his dynamic wife, spied this extraordinary house just ten kilometres north of Hikkaduwa surfer's beach on a trip they took towards the end of their decade-long posting in Delhi. She oversaw a complete renovation of her impulse buy and then filled the white mansion with antique colonial furniture, chosen for comfort as well as design.

After they moved to Europe, friends convinced the Maxes to let the place out to like-minded travellers. To reach Max Wadiya, drive two hours south of the capital just past the fish-

ing town, Ambalangoda, to Parrot Junction.

On the top verandah, you are nearly eye level with the parrots that squawk in the coconut palms. Fishing catamarans sail towards the horizon, breakers tumble on the wide beach beyond the patio, and there is a quiet lagoon on the opposite side of Galle road. (Not for nothing are the beds swathed in mosquito netting.) Sunsets are so compelling you don't miss television, but information junkies may find the house telephone sufficient to get online, using a temporary Lankanet card, available in Colombo bookshops. Oily ayurvedic massage in Sri Lanka is a distant cousin to the Thai version on offer at temples, and diving through a wave afterwards is invigorating.

Zoysa, the Singhalese cook delights in dishing up spicy concoctions, but can cook western fare, too. Traditional hoppers for breakfast will challenge even palates accustomed to Thai peppers. The staff grills fresh fish to order, and serves snacks and luscious fruit in the two thatched garden pavilions. Beach towels and sun loungers are on hand, but bring along a paperback to leave behind and upgrade what's been dubbed the "World's Worst Library."

Further details can be found on the website: <http://www.maxwadiya.com>

Staying in the dreamhouse of a globe-trotting journalist can provide a glimpse of paradise with none of the upkeep. Suits me just fine.



Cuba Calling

Jim Pringle, former correspondent of *Reuters*, *Newsweek* and the *Times* of London, reminds us of life beyond Bangkok and how much fun our business once was.

It was the third day of my Cuba assignment and, with a hijacked American airliner winging towards Havana, I was trying to deal with a buxom Cuban wench prancing around au naturel in the apartment that served as office and home.

The year was 1968. The young woman, whom I had seen in the elevator as I arrived to start my assignment with Reuters, had looked

Vietnam War was at its height; I had been Reuters bureau chief in Saigon and had just covered the Tet Offensive. While en route to Havana, I saw on the FBI's ten most wanted list mug shots of Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver. He was sought for 'assault with intent to commit murder' and was 'considered armed and extremely dangerous'. New York colleagues told me to 'keep a look out' for him, but I hardly thought I'd be involved.

Outwardly austere, socialist Cuba was quite the most pleasure-loving place I had been. For a single man, it seemed a garden of earthly delights. It was the Swinging Sixties, after all, and pre-AIDS. The only person who seemed above it all was Castro. Cubans said he was 'married to the Revolution'.

When I went to visit Ernest Hemingway's former home I had my first opportunity to chat to North Vietnamese students who were admiring 'Papa's' library and the swimming pool where Ava Gardner famously swam minus swimsuit. Having reported the Vietnam War was a plus, for at diplomatic receptions Castro would quiz me about it and once introduced me to a visiting Viet Cong leader. Then, I had guarded admiration for the Cuba leader for standing up to the Americans, whose napalm and B52 attacks I had witnessed.

But the main news was the almost daily hijackings, mostly carried out by black Americans, some of them genuine radicals but others prison escapees. I used to race the AP man to the airport. Next year, there were rumours Cleaver might really be in Havana, possibly near where I stayed. After two days of door-knocking I had an address. To reach his flat, one took a small lift at the back of a garage. I knocked and a Panther in black outfit with beret opened the door. "Mr Cleaver, please," I said, feigning a nonchalance I did not feel. I was asked in and then I saw the man on the FBI poster. I had found him ahead of the Feds.

Cleaver could not give an interview then, but would call me later. He asked me not to

reveal meantime that he was in Cuba. The news was too major not to file. The Cuban authorities could have stopped my cable but it went through. I nervously switched on my short-wave radio and heard 'Cleaver found'. Reuters called saying the story was on front-pages all over the US, including the New York Times. This was a good, old-fashioned scoop: I say that, knowing reporters dare not boast because when they do they usually fall down on the next story. Cleaver forfeited US\$50,000 bail money, and that pissed him off.

When I went back, implausibly hoping for the full interview, two mean-looking dudes – one I recognised as an escaped convict serving a murder rap – asked me to follow them. We crammed into the lift, and I wondered if I would emerge in one piece. The ex-con said, "I know you are CIA", and told me I would be hearing from them.

Soon after, a dancer I knew slightly from the National Ballet visited. She was the girlfriend of a hijacker, and said they were trying to find my address. Unknown to the authorities, they had a gun, she said. God, this seemed almost worse than Vietnam! I was spooked by menacing phone calls, and moved in with the British Consul. Reuters was tipped off, and I was ordered to leave. I departed without a drinks party and without saying goodbye.

Soon, for my pains, I was sitting in judgering helicopters over Vietnam again, covering the attack on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and the invasion of Cambodia. Then I re-opened the Reuter office in Peking. Joining Newsweek as Latin American correspondent, I was invited by General Omar Torrijos of Panama to accompany him to visit El Comandante Fidel. In Havana that second time, I saw Cuban friends I had earlier seemed to desert.

Then, when Castro visited another maverick leader, Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Kuala Lumpur, I quizzed the Cuban leader about such matters as his John Lennon statue (the Beatles were banned when I was there) until finally he put his arm around my shoulder and said: "Come back and see the changes for yourself!"

I landed in Havana for the third time with my wife Milly (pictured right), whom I had met in Cambodia, just as Castro began his crack-down, jailing 75 human rights activists for up to 28 years. But decaying old Havana had been renovated with UN assistance as a poetic colonial city untouched by globalisation or chain junk food outlets. It no longer looked like a tropical East Berlin. Schoolchildren played safely outdoors. Little twin girls polished Lennon's statue daily. There were the same ancient old cars, and pure musical energy.

We went to see Swan Lake and I mentally

blessed all ballerinas. Hiring a small car, we drove 3,000 bone-shaking miles, staying with local families, sampling their rum and crushed mint mojitos. As a Cambodian, Milly benefited from a state-encouraged fraternity with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. "You fought with us in the same trench against Yanqui Imperialism!" Er, yes. Have you heard of the Khmer Rouge?

Nowadays, no one mentions Fidel Castro by name, otherwise ears prick up, and snoopers abound. They call him 'the Boss' or 'He,' or they stroke an imaginary beard. Now, plenty is known of his love life and that he has at least nine children from four women. He wasn't married just to the Revolution after all...

I used to think Fidel had the best interests of Cubans at heart, but it was really just *his* interests. Many potential challengers were jailed, or worse. The average monthly wage is just US\$15. Even the vaunted health service and school system is not what it was.

Despite all this, Cuba is still a magical country to visit.



in, she said, to say welcome. I had served her a neighbourly coffee – Cubans could not buy the island's coffee, though foreigners could purchase it at the diplomatic store. It was when I innocently gave her some for her mother, whom she said yearned for a 'cafecito', that she began flinging off her clothes.

You don't often see girls in a state of nature in Reuters' offices, especially nowadays. Then the phone rang about the hijacking, and I had to bundle her out.

I fondly recalled this incident while sitting in the departure lounge at Madrid airport earlier this year, some 35 years later, to start my third visit to Fidel Castro's socialist republic.

When I arrived in Cuba back in 1968, there were strong racial tensions in the US and the



But go now before a million vengeful exiles return and turn charming but impoverished Havana into Miami South. Listen to fantastic music, drink mojitos at La Bodeguita del Medio where Hemingway had his, eat out in the now revived Chinatown, buy an (incredibly politically incorrect) golliwog, dance the salsa, admire the way the girls still walk *that* walk, ignore the jineteros or spivs – and eat the great ice-cream at Copellia.

It was there that a luscious mulatta asked this now veteran correspondent: "Que buscas, mi hijito?" ("What are you looking for, my little son?") "Just a vanilla ice-cream," I replied. "But thanks a lot for asking."





Hidden Wars Revisited



For fifteen years until 1975, Hmong guerrillas were the brave and loyal allies of the United States, providing essential combat, reconnaissance and recovery support for the CIA's secret war against the Vietnamese and Pathet Lao in Laos.

In April 1975, the US withdrew its troops from Indochina and in the following month the CIA evacuated about 2,500 Hmong officers and their families from their secret base at Long Cheng in Laos to Thailand.

Two and a half decades later, those who were unable to escape continue to suffer persecution at the hands of the Lao Army because of their allegiance to the US.

In the heart of the Moung Xaysomboune Special (military) Zone in the mountains of Northern Laos, a group of CIA secret war veterans and their families continue to fight for their lives to this day. Desperately low

on food and ammunition, their tactics are simple and dictated by their predicament... Defend and run... but their plight is becoming increasingly desperate by the day as Lao ground troops tighten the noose around them.

"This time" says Hmong Commander Moua Toua Ther, "When the helicopters come, we will not be able to run or hide. We will be butchered like wild animals."

I fear that many of the people whose faces appear in this exhibition will, even as you regard their likenesses, be already dead or dying in the mountains of Laos.

*Philip Blenkinsop
Bangkok May 30th 2003*



AN AFTER-THOUGHT

This obscure but grotesque humanitarian disaster cannot be denied, thanks to Blenkinsop's powerful pictures.

But could there be other layers to the story? Hmong exiles based in the US, still led by the CIA's controversial one-time frontman General Vang Pao, use the plight of their brethren in the jungles to campaign in the US against any recognition of the Lao government they loathe.

At stake is not only the survival of bands like these, but the granting of Normal Trading Relations between Laos and the US.

Can it be a coincidence that each time those trade ties come closer, something headline-grabbing happens to highlight the Lao government's bad rights record? It might be a "bandit attack," or a detention of foreign journalists.

One can either believe simply that the Lao government is indeed all evil. Or maybe various groups and agendas are in conflict, with journalists or tourists often used as piggies in the middle.

Most Hmong in Laos live just like other Laotians. Some are comfortable members of the Lao government. Many are seekers of jobs in industries which could grow enormously with the advent of Normal Trading Ties.

So who's zooming who?

- Vaudine England

Date with Darkness

Read this first-hand account by FCCT journalist member **Jill Powell** and imagine what might happen in Bangkok – where chaos is a norm – if it were afflicted by a comparable blackout.

In New York, a city of alphanumeric street names, dates have become shorthand for disaster. On the scale of things, 8/14 cannot be compared to the tragedy of 9/11, but it already holds historic significance in the minds of most New Yorkers as the day they were left in the dark. It was a giant wake-up call for many, and New York a test-bed for the theory that the distance between life-as-we-know-it and chaos is possibly little more than a switch away.

The North American power grid surged out of control soon after 4.10 pm on that sweltering Thursday. There was no warning. In just ninety seconds, New York, Pennsylvania, the Midwest and much of Ontario Canada were plunged into darkness. Fifty million people were left powerless in the worst power outage the world has ever seen. Computers crashed. Air conditioners cut out in thousands of businesses and homes. Traffic went into gridlock. Rail transport ceased and flights were delayed. Millions of workers were forced to evacuate famous city skyscrapers down flights of stairs. The city came to a standstill. The finger of blame was pointed back and forth across the power grid and landed nowhere.

On 8/14, as on 9/11, cell phones proved useless in the overload. Land line calls into and around the blackout area remained unanswered by redundant electronically operated switchboards, answering machines and portable telephones. Cash registers crashed and supermarkets and food stores closed their doors. Internet lines were lost. Security systems at airports died. Bags boarded flights unchecked. Those supposed to be protecting us were on the streets directing traffic. It was a would-be-terrorist's dream.

Those who lived within walking distance made the most of a workday cut short. They barbecued meat that would have otherwise spoiled, and partied with neighbours by candlelight. Mobile hot dog stands did a roaring trade. It was an otherwise perfect summer night. "We've been through 9/11, we can cope with a night without lights," said one Midtown reveller taking advantage of cut-price food and drink, as bars and restaurants worked desperately in the dark to move perishable stock.

By ten pm, resignation had replaced optimism. Those unable to get back to the commuter belt bunkered down for the night in parks and on municipal steps. Out-of-towners were unable to get to their hotel rooms. Elevators were out of action and electronic door key pads didn't work. Toilets filled and overflowed with no power to flush. Airports and railway stations ground to a halt and the terminals became temporary refugee camps. Beaches were closed because of untreated sewage leaks, and tap water in some affected areas was pronounced undrinkable. Overnight, emergency lights ran batteries dry. Portable radios died, and so did our link to the outside world. A sense of isolation and helplessness remained. The city that never sleeps was eerily quiet. Manhattan became Batman's Gotham.

As in all moments of crisis there were acts of great kindness and great selfishness. Those out for a quick buck sold-on flashlights purchased at the dollar store for three. Water doubled, then tripled, in price as it became harder to find. Rogue taxis prowled the streets in search of those desperate enough to pay top dollar for a ride. Unlike the big blackout of '77, when 3,500 arrests were made, there was

no mass looting or rioting. Despite the heat, humidity and confusion the streets remained calm.

Power came on eventually, block by block. At JFK International Airport, cheers erupted as the lights finally flickered on around sunset Friday. The euphoria was short-lived. As the power kicked in, so did people's impatience. Ground staff, dazed by lack of sleep, struggled to clear the backlog of frustrated passengers, many of whom couldn't get flights out until the following week. And there wasn't a single hotel or motel room left in all Manhattan.

Thirty hours of discomfort and inconvenience and one hot sleepless night without electricity seems embarrassingly insignificant in the whole scheme of world events. But the lesson was anything but insignificant in human terms. Our increasing reliance on electricity and the ease with which it can be taken away has made us vulnerable. We are woefully unprepared for either the disruption, or the speed with which it can happen.

The fact that a state-of-emergency was called, news of the blackout flashed around the world, and the President informed within minutes of it happening demonstrates the potential seriousness of such a catastrophe.

Authorities are now questioning their ability to either predict or cope with such disasters. How do you keep a city the size of New York – or London, or Bangkok for that matter – operational without power? Is it possible to evacuate millions of people in an emergency? Power, it appears, lies not in the hands of presidents and power brokers but with electrical engineers who manage the energy we so desire in our lives.

The fact that we can be disabled so easily must be of enormous interest to those who wish to harm us most. We have become slaves to watts and voltages. As our demand has increased so has our dependence. We are powerless without it. Think beyond MP3 players, cell phones and internet access, washing machines, electric razors and hair dryers, and imagine life without lights, heating and refrigeration, gas to cook with (it's booted by electricity), TV and radio, ATMs and cash on demand, information systems, transport, traffic lights and power to pump gas. All these things have given us a false sense of ourselves.

We are stuck in a world of our own making and there is no turning back.

Electric currents are notoriously unreliable and volatile beasts and the management of them an inexact art. They dip and surge and cannot be relied upon to behave. It is a fact we have failed to grasp despite the warnings. The US has had a major power outage every decade or so since the 1960s, and there is now talk of a much-needed upgrade of the system.

Those who survived 8/14 emerged as different people from the experience. We'll be carrying flashlights and extra batteries wherever we go. 8/14

will happen again, as sure as the sun comes up tomorrow, and at least we'll have light. Forget rocket-launchers and shoe-bombs, chaos is closer than you think. Some of us have been to the edge and it's a scary place.

Jill Powell was in New York doing research for a PhD on August 14th. She was stranded in New York City without a change of clothes, accommodation or a flight out for three days. She wishes to thank two complete strangers from Larchmont Westchester County, NY for rescuing her. On an ordinary day she teaches in the School of Business Management at Assumption University Bangkok.

OBITUARY— MAXINE NORTH

An Appreciation

When Maxine North passed away in August 2003, the FCCT lost one of its founding lights. She was someone who sat with club founder Jorge Orgibet as he lay dying, who was a friend of Jim Thompson, and who was a pioneer among the many bright and beautiful Western women who have made their home in Thailand.

North came to Thailand in 1950 with her husband, screenwriter Robert G. North. He was working for the Far East Films Co, as cover for his real job with the CIA. Tragically, four years later, a bad fall in the bathroom combined with polio caused his sudden death, prompting North to contemplate going back to the USA.

"But she decided no, she would stay in Thailand because she liked it, and she got the idea of starting up the bottled water business," recalls Arlette Cykman, who nursed Maxine North until her death. Arlette's late mother Vera, who came here in 1949 from Russia via Shanghai, was best friends with Maxine.

"All the big shots said Thais won't buy water when they can get it from



Photo by John Everingham

the tap, boil it and put it in the fridge. But she insisted it could be done and she was right. She also started the first dry ice company, for packing ice cream and so forth. Once Polaris was doing quite well, she went to Chiang Mai, discovered the celadon kilns, and started the Thai Celadon company, which still exists," says Ms Cykman.

North also founded the Nipa Lodge, the first of what is now a world famous complex of luxury hotels in Pattaya. And she laid claim to introducing commercial

advertising to Thailand and to starting its first English-language radio station.

"Show every clever woman, the men were afraid of her. She had not that many friends, but could stand up to anyone. She was interested in lots of things and read a lot. But she was so hurt that her husband was taken away from her like that, that she became bitter.

"My mother and Maxine were the two most beautiful foreign women at the time, they were cosmopolitan women, women of the world. Maxine and my father [Lewis Cykman] were among the founders of the American Chamber of Commerce," added Ms Cykman.

North died aged 83, on October 3 in Pattaya, where she had retired. Born in Salem, Oregon, USA, she is buried in Pattaya's Catholic cemetery.

A Fading Dream

"A Fading Dream – The Story of Roeslan Abdulgani and Indonesia"

By Retnowati Abdulgani-Knapp
Times Books International,
Singapore 2003

Reviewed by Vaudine England

In all our coverage of Indonesia since the fall of Suharto, Indonesians and foreigners alike have often lacked a sense of history. Eager to expose the many crimes of Suharto, we forget why many Indonesians were prepared to let him rule for so long.

This book tries to pin down a national consciousness even as it changes rapidly before our eyes. By so doing it also helps explain why ordinary Indonesians are so very susceptible to manipulation by their cynical powers-that-be. Being the life story of one of Indonesia's wisest old men, written by his daughter, it offers a personalised insight into the emotions and logic behind those events.

Here we learn about why Indonesians have a not inconsiderable distrust of the outside world, why leftovers from colonialism are still at issue even when outsiders may think half a century was long enough to get over it, and why Indonesians have a deep-seated mistrust of the United Nations.

It reminds us of the original Indonesian nationalism, which saw ragtag bands of ill-trained guerrillas laying down their lives against Dutch and British bombing, which is today debased when put in the service of private gain.

The dream in the book's title is of a united and just state of Indonesia. It is fading thanks to ghastly failures of

leadership, about which Wati minces no words. Indeed she begins with a delightful rant against current President Megawati Sukarnoputri, all the more powerful coming as it does from a family which served Megawati's father.

Nationalism is not necessarily a dirty word, even if it did help Suharto stay in power for too long. Back in the 1920s and 1930s, a critical period for understanding the Indonesia of today, bright boys like Roeslan Abdulgani could get an education despite a brown skin, because he was just clever enough

the first president, Sukarno, and later worked for President Suharto. He has advised any subsequent leader who has asked for it – and can make fascinating comparisons between Sukarno, Suharto and the rest.

Wati, who surprised even herself by producing this book, is one of many educated, independent-thinking Indonesians who find it hard to live in their own country these days for the travesty it has become. She divides her time between homes in Bangkok, Ascot (England) and Jakarta.

Here effervescent personality and biting wit sneak through this book, giving it an edge and vigour not often found in a daughter's record of her father. One of the many wonders of Wati is that she says just what she thinks, and her father Roeslan seems to like it.

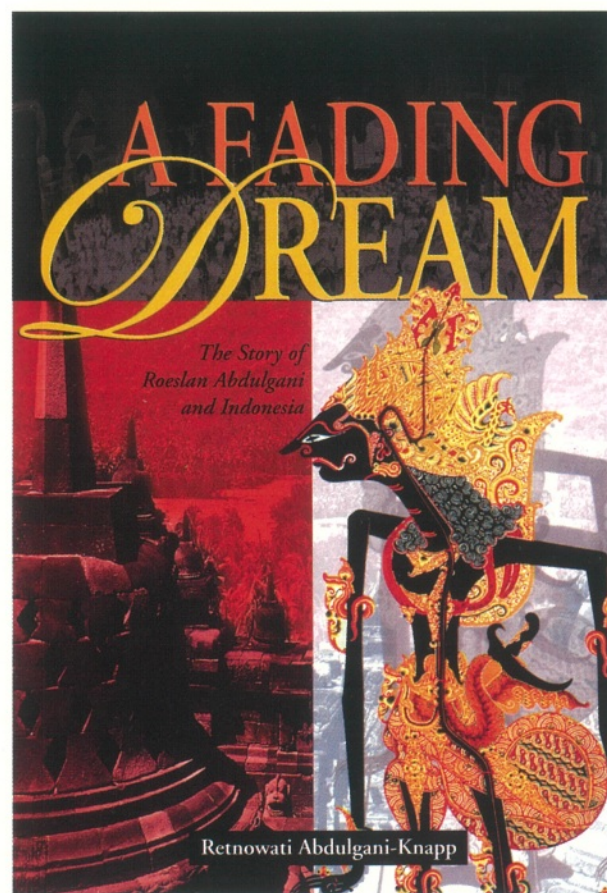
There is only one avoidable outrage in this book, and for that the blame must lie squarely on the Singaporean publishers, *Times*.

Especially in the earlier pages, there are grammatical and spelling errors on almost every page. It is shocking that a publisher presumably keen to gain a reputation in English-language publishing, clearly didn't bother to do its part of the job by hiring a copy editor. Such faults are never the author's, the responsibility rests with the publisher.

As more publishers enter the growing English-language market in Asia, perhaps it is time for someone to consider

the notion of quality?

And while we're complaining, why wouldn't Asia Books consider distributing a book which covers Asian history and personality with verve? You have to buy this one at Changi airport, in Jakarta, or via Amazon.



Retnowati Abdulgani-Knapp

to skim the Dutch quotas. From then on he's been a source of inspiration to Indonesians who dream of a united country to call their own.

Roeslan is an unusual man, who made his way up from a kampung in Surabaya to become ambassador to the United Nations. He was an intimate of

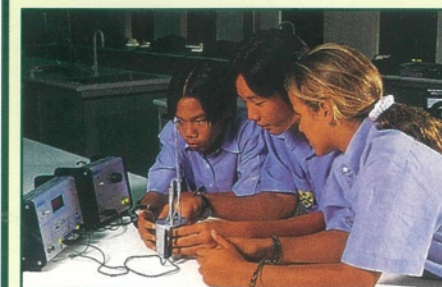


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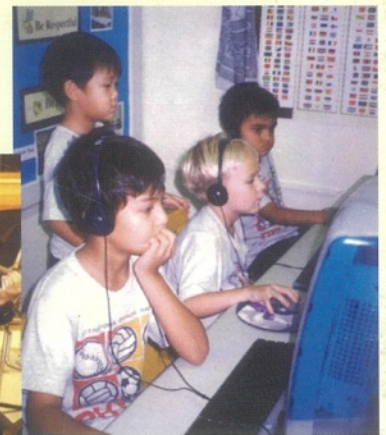


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