

The truth about that photograph

Hence the allegation that our newspaper had doctored or tampered with a picture in question showing a mock hanging at Thammasat University, which triggered off a counter-protest and, subsequently, a backlash by right-wing elements. The disturbing allegation keeps coming up every October and it did so yet again at a panel discussion at Thammasat University yesterday.

A fruitless gesture

While we of course sympathise with Americans concerned over the more than 2,000 US soldiers listed as missing in action from the Vietnam War, throwing money in the Mekong is not the answer. It may bring slight relief to relatives of MiAs who have spent two decades living with uncertainty, but it strains our country's relations with our neighbours and interferes with ongoing diplomatic efforts to pacify the border region.

tamper with or doctor any picture for whatever reason, particularly the one in question. After the publication of the picture on October 5, 1976, the Special Branch police came to our office to confiscate the negative film and pictures for examination. A thorough investigation was conducted and it was proven beyond any scientific doubt that neither the negative film nor the pictures had been doctored or tampered with in any way.

As a long-established newspaper, we have always held journalistic ethics and professionalism in high regard. We pride ourselves on being a responsible publication and would never jeopardise our reputation by resorting to any sort of trickery intended to mislead the public.

Westerners sighted in Indochinese camps. For years they have suffered Hanoi's heartless bartering of MIA remains for continued US financial aid. We can see things from their perspective.

Now please see things from ours. This country is a friend of the US, but that gives no one the right to disregard our laws or the will of our government. Officials have made clear our policy that Thai territory may not be used to interfere in the affairs of our neighbours. It is as simple as that.

Please don't take this the wrong way. We do not mean to seem unaccommodating or unsympathetic. Actually, in one way we're grateful. Nearly all that cash being dumped in the river has ended up in the hands of Thai villagers downstream. However, we don't think they'll be able to produce an American prisoner of war as a result.

DATELINE BANGKOK

CHILE'S 16-party "Command for the No," which ran against President Augusto Pinochet, was a tactical alliance whose leaders had little in common but opposition to what they saw as a military dictatorship.

Chileans will now have to wait and see whether the alliance can hold together and set up coherent policies for a Chile after Pinochet.

In Wednesday's plebiscite, 7.4 million Chileans were asked to vote yes or no to another eight years in power for a man who brought prosperity to many middle class Chileans but denied them democratic freedom.

"This vote was cast by the government as a choice between stability and uncertainty, between the known and the unknown," said a Latin American diplomat. "After 15 years under the same man, the people opted for change."

Official final results may be delayed by up to 10 days.

But Interior Minister Sergio Fernandez, his deputy Alberto Cardemil and the commander of the Chilean air force, Gen Fernando Matthei, all acknowledged early yesterday that Pinochet had lost.

With 71 per cent of the vote counted, Cardemil said Pinochet had lost by 44 to 53 per cent.

"It seems the 'no' has really won," said Matthei, a member of the military junta which has run Chile since the bloody 1973 coup which toppled Marxist president Salvador Allende. The coup, in which Allende died, ruptured 150 years of democratic tradition in one of the most politicised countries in the western hemisphere.

The coup ended three years of political turmoil and economic instability which drove inflation to record levels and sapped the income of Chile's middle class, one of the biggest in Latin America.

Government election propaganda had portrayed a vote against Pinochet as an invitation for a return to the turbulent days of the Allende government.

Diplomats in Santiago said it was impossible to predict what course Chile would take after Pinochet's defeat, which took government supporters by surprise after confident predictions of victory.

The "Command for the No" alliance spans the political spectrum

Wanted

Ho Chi Minh City — "Good question," replied Mr Vu Hac Bong, direc-

October 6, 1976 lives in the memories of those of us who were young activists taking part in that traumatic and bloody uprising, or who witnessed it.

Every time the memory of this national tragedy is revived, the finger is pointed at the *Bangkok Post*. We are accused of being part of a conspiracy to crush the student movement and are held responsible for triggering off incidents that led to bloodshed.

This year, the 20th anniversary of the event, accusations are again being made. They focus on the publication in the *Post's* October 5, 1976 edition of a photo showing a mock hanging at Thammasat University. The lingering allegation is that the photo was doctored. Another paper accused of doctoring the photo was *Dao Siam* (now defunct).

Apart from a clarification issued in 1988, we have chosen to remain silent, not wishing to revive this painful episode in the nation's history and hoping that the accusation will fade with the passing of time or that our accusers, or those who doubt us, will come forward to get our side of the story or to get to the facts. But it seems our accusers are content to pass a verdict without holding a fair trial. Silence has been interpreted as admitting that there is substance to the allegation. We therefore feel compelled to speak out, to put down the facts and set the record straight.

The photo in question was not in any way doctored. The negative was not tampered with. This can be verified by Special Branch police, who examined the film and photo, and confiscated the film at the order of the government of M.R. Seni Pramoj.

The picture of the mock hanging was taken by one of our stringers, Tham Luangmanotham, who witnessed the event on the afternoon of October 4. The film was developed in our darkroom. Prints were made in the same room. When they were presented at the news conference, none of us saw that the actor in the mock hanging looked like a member of the Royal Family. The decision to use the photo was straightforward: it was the best of the day.

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When the photo appeared in the *Post* the next day, several people, apparently from right-wing groups, made threatening telephone calls to our offices. A demonstration was staged outside the home of the then-prime minister. Special Branch police came to our office to ask for the film and prints so that they could examine them. The photographer was questioned several times. The *Post* was cleared by the police of doctoring the film or photo, which is why no legal action was taken. The film is now with Special Branch.

An unusually enlarged photo of the mock hanging, taken from a different angle, appeared in the afternoon edition of *Dao Siam* on October 5. We have no idea whether anything was done to that photo, but there was certainly no collaboration between ourselves and *Dao Siam*.

Those of us responsible for making decisions about the presentation of news and photos feel deep sorrow about the carnage. There were people out there who wanted to crush the student movement and overthrow the Seni administration. We might have blundered in not looking at the photo more carefully, like the conspirators who were looking for a pretext to unleash their brute force. But we were never part of such a conspiracy, deliberately or otherwise. And we never will be.