How to Screw Up a Great Idea

By Jim Ratt

Is it me or is it the world? Every day I read newspapers and watch the news, hoping against hope that I've gone insane, or at least, dreamt it all up, but unfortunately, it never turns out to be the case.

Take the latest story making headlines in the Land of Smiles (front page news, no less). The ever-so-caring Culture Ministry of Thailand has recently become aware of a horrible assault on Thai culture. It appears – charges the Ministry – that we are being overrun by bare breasts.

The subversive offenders, however, are not the nudie bars and massage parlors that have spread all over the country like a bad case of measles, as some of you may be insinuating. Neither are they the unscrupulous VCD vendors that sell movies in which bare breasts are seen a lot more often than faces. Oh, no, sir. After all, everyone knows that all the abovementioned businesses provide nothing but clean and wholesome family entertainment (and by pure coincidence, keep the economy running).

On the other hand, there is a devious segment of society that will stop at nothing until it destroys the very foundation of Thai cultural heritage. The despicable evil-doer is, in fact, the fashion industry.

Bare breasts have been showing up on catwalks all over Bangkok and although it's only a rumor, I hear from very reliable sources that models actually have – GASP! – nipples! Oh, the horror! We can't let people know that women have nipples! That would completely unravel the very fabric of our decent society. Thank God for the vigilant Culture Ministry who is here to warn us of the "obscenity disguised as art"! (Looks like those bastards Leonardo and Michelangelo were pornographers too. Geniuses my ass!)

Apparently, the Ministry considers bare breasts to be "a breach of Thai culture". Am I the only idiot, who looks at the frescos depicting life in Thailand that adorn the walls of damn near every cultural monument in this country? Those women aren't exactly wearing burkas, are they? Were those murals painted by the evil Burmese? And this, coming from the Ministry that outlawed "songs about forbidden love" a few short weeks ago! (Am I the only looney bin escapee, who thinks that love cannot be obscene by definition?)

It's so damn reassuring to see the Culture Ministry taking lessons from the Taliban. Those folks might not be too educated, but hell, when it comes to protecting the country from foreign cultural influences, they're second to none.

Here is another story from a seemingly unrelated field. If we had access to a time machine that could send us back to 1990, we would discover that Bangkok and Pattaya had several shops that sold supplements from abroad. In those days, you could find a wide range of supplements from a wide range of manufacturers. (One of the best nutrition stores was located near the Villa Market on Sukhumvit Road.) While the line of products never came anywhere near similar stores in the US, it was still rather impressive.

Enter the infamous Thai Food & Drug Administration act that virtually outlawed the sales of any supplements in Thailand, unless they have been shown to be safe by extensive local research. There was only one problem: there hadn't been any Thai nutritional research to write home about. There never was any funding for it either. Numerous businesses immediately went belly up, their livelihoods destroyed. Consumers were left with nothing as well. Among the supplements that gained the status of dangerous and illegal drugs (which flies in the face of extensive American and European research) was protein.

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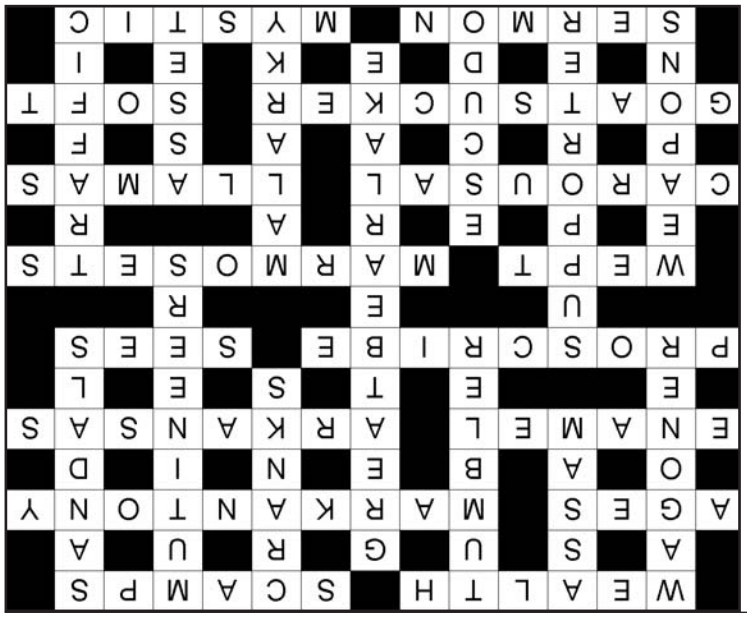
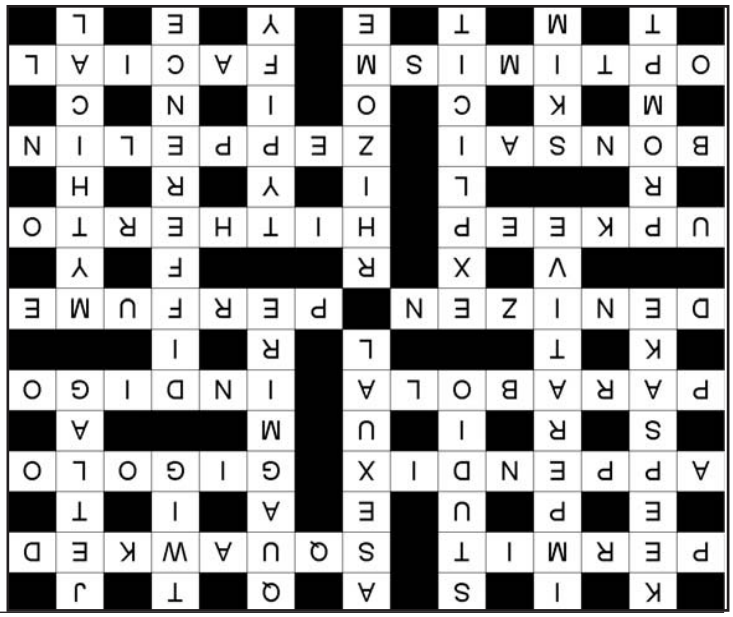
Order Gentlemen!

The order in which they finished was: Thornton, Jones, then Smith

Solutions - Below: Cryptic Crossword, Below Right: Numerical Crossword