

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 28343

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TAGS: PGOV PINT TH

SUBJECT: TWO UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS' VIEWS ON THE COUP AND
SURROUNDING EVENTS

SUMMARY: EMBOFFS LUNCHED WITH TWO YOUNG PROFESSORS FROM
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY ON OCT 13 AND DISCUSSED THE RECENT
COUP AND SURROUNDING EVENTS. BOTH PROFESSORS ARE PROGRESSIVE
IN OUTLOOK BUT NOT PARTICULARLY LEFTIST, AND ARE WELL-KNOWN
TO EMBOFFS. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONVERSATION.
END SUMMARY.

1. BOTH PROFESSORS WERE UNHAPPY ABOUT THE COUP OF
OCT 6, WERE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE, BUT SEEMED
RESIGNED TO WHAT HAS HAPPENED. THEY THOUGHT THAT THE
GOVERNMENT WOULD BEGIN CRACKING DOWN ON UNIVERSITY TEACHERS
WITH LIBERAL OR LEFTIST VIEWS, AND THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT
OR IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO CONTINUE TEACHING. ONE, WHO
FORMERLY TAUGHT COURSES ON THE THAI MILITARY IN POLITICS
AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST POLITICAL SYSTEM, SAID THAT WITH THE
RESTRICTIONS HE EXPECTS TO BE IMPOSED BY THE NARC, HE
WILL HAVE NO PLACE IN THE THAI EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM. HE
SAID THAT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES HE WILL PROBABLY BE
UNABLE TO TEACH OR WRITE. HE EXPECTED THE NARC TO FIRE
SOME TEACHERS, AND TO HARRASS OTHERS INTO TOEING THE
LINE.

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2. BOTH PROFESSORS SAID THAT THEY HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN BAILING OUT SOME OF THE STUDENTS ARRESTED AT THAMMASAT OCT 6. THEY SAID THAT BAIL HAD BEEN GUARANTEED BY THE STATE UNIVERSITIES BUREAU (AN RTG ENTITY), AND THAT NO CASH OR COLLATERAL WAS ACTUALLY PUT UP. THEY SAID THAT ONLY A FEW OF THE ARRESTED STUDENTS WERE FROM THAMMASAT, THE REST COMING FROM CHULALONGKON, RAMKHAMHAENG, AND OTHER UNIVERSITIES. MANY OF THOSE ARRESTED WERE NOT EVEN STUDENTS AT ALL, AS SOME HAD BEEN OUT OF UNIVERSITY UP TO EIGHT YEARS. BOTH SAID THAT STUDENTS ARRESTED DID NOT APPEAR TO BE INTIMIDATED AT ALL, AND IN FACT WERE SINGING AND TAUNTING THEIR POLICE GUARDS. THE PROFESSORS FELT THAT THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES HAD RADICALIZED THEM EVEN MORE THAN THEY WERE PREVIOUSLY, AND THAT MANY WOULD IMMEDIATELY RESUME THEIR ACTIVITIES UPON RELEASE. (BANGKOK NEWSPAPERS REPORTED ON OCT 13 THAT ONE ACTIVIST OUT ON BAIL HAS ALREADY BEEN RE-ARRESTED FOR "INCITING" WORKERS AT A WATER REFINERY PLANT.)

3. WHEN ASKED IF THE STUDENTS AT THAMMASAT WERE ARMED DURING THEIR CONFRONTATION WITH POLICE, ONE PROFESSOR ANSWERED THAT A FORMER STUDENT OF HIS, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS A "HARD CORE COMMUNIST," HAD BEEN ARRESTED AT THAMMASAT IN POSSESSION OF A SHOTGUN. HE SAID THE FORMER STUDENT, CHARAN DITTHAPICHAJ, HAD BEEN A COMMUNIST ACTIVIST FOR YEARS AND HAD ALSO BEEN AN IMPORTANT MEMBER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND.

4. BOTH PROFESSORS THOUGHT THAT THE NEW CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD BE WEAK, AND THAT THE MILITARY WOULD CONTINUE TO WIELD THE REAL POWER. ONE FELT THAT THERE WAS AN INHERENT INSTABILITY IN THE NARC. HE SAID THAT IT WAS TOO LARGE FOR EFFICIENT DECISION MAKING, AND SAID THAT MANY OF ITS MEMBERS WERE OLD AND NOT VERY SHARP. HE ADDED THAT, IN THE PAST, ALL COUP GROUPS HAD INCLUDED INFLUENTIAL YOUNGER COLONELS, BUT THAT THIS GROUP HAD NO FIGURES IN THIS CATEGORY. HE FELT THAT THERE WAS A POTENTIAL FOR SOME OF THESE YOUNGER MEN TO STATE A COUNTER-COUP IF AN OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED

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ITSELF. ON THE WHOLE, HE CONCLUDED, THE NARC WAS MODERATE IN OUTLOOK, COMPARED TO THE MORE STRONGLY RIGHT-WING MILITARY FIGURES HE EXPECTED TO EMERGE.

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