

# Thai leader says he won't back down

By Amit Baruah

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SINGAPORE, DEC. 27. The January 6 general election in Thailand has been thrown wide open by the decision of the country's National Counter-Corruption Commission (NCCC) to indict Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, leader of the Thai Rak Thai party, for wrongly declaring his assets.

While Mr. Thaksin has announced that he will continue with his election bid, many analysts believe that his bid for Prime Minister has been dealt a serious blow. "I will not give up politics, and I will stand firm to work for the Thai people. I am confident that I am innocent. I have never been corrupt. I earned all my assets through hard work," Mr. Thaksin, a billionaire telecom tycoon, said in a televised response after the NCCC decision.

"I am still a candidate. If the people elect me, I will be the Prime Minister. Absolutely," Mr. Thaksin said, making it clear that he was not about to throw in the towel. "I am confident that I will get a fair trial. The people will be the first to judge me on January 6. The court will be the second," Mr. Thaksin said, referring to the decision of the Constitutional Court which must confirm the NCCC indict-

ment. In the NCCC itself, the vote was 8-1 in favour of indicting Mr. Thaksin, who, along with his wife, were charged with wrongly declaring his assets. Shares in several companies were transferred in the name of their domestic staff, the charge against the Prime Ministerial candidate said.

For his part, the NCCC Chairman, Mr. Ophars Arunin, was clear: "It can be seen this process was dishonest because if everything was done honestly, there was no need to use the name of nominees (Mr. Thaksin's maid, chauffeur and security guard)."

"Mr. Thaksin was well aware of this process because he and his wife are a couple.... These people (the nominees) are close to Thaksin. They live and work with him. The evidence revealed that his wife was the one who ordered to buy or sell shares in the name of nominees," Mr. Ophars said, confirming that the NCCC was serious about cleaning up public life in Thailand. Clearly, Mr. Thaksin, who has built up his party through the massive ploughing of funds, will be loath to give up his chance to become Prime Minister.

The Thai Rak Thai party, which has already promised that they will set up a one million baht development programme for every vil-

lage in the country, had an excellent chance to take power given the dissatisfaction with the incumbent Democrat party. Now, however, the game has taken a different turn with the indictment of Mr. Thaksin. Will Thai Rak Thai still be able to make it? Or should it nominate a new leader?

The fact that Mr. Thaksin has already announced that he will be Prime Minister in case his party wins shows that Thai Rak Thai essentially is a one-man show. In case the party and Mr. Thaksin manage to gain power, the telecom tycoon will probably remain Prime Minister until the decision of the Constitutional Court. If it goes in his favour, Mr. Thaksin stays on or else he will be disqualified for five years. However, he may well end up damaging his own party's chances to turn the table on the Democrats.

There is little doubt that the Thai electorate will take note of the NCCC indictment. Thailand, which is well on the path of becoming a full-fledged democracy, is holding elections under a new Constitution, of which the NCCC is another creature. Mr. Thaksin's announcement that he will persist in his campaign to become Prime Minister can only complicate the country's politics.

THE IRRAWADDI

NOV 28 1999

# Rajan escapes from Bangkok hospital

PTI & REUTERS SFH

BANGKOK, Nov. 24. — Underworld don Chhota Rajan drugged guards and used knotted bedsheets to escape from police custody in a Bangkok hospital early this morning.

Police suspect that Rajan, fighting an extradition bid by India, drugged the two officers inside his room and avoided the five armed guards outside by sliding down the bedsheets tied together to serve as a makeshift rope from his fourth floor room at Samitivej Hospital. His associates, acting as his bodyguards, also fled with Rajan.

There are unconfirmed reports that Rajan bribed his way out of the hospital. The don was being treated for gunshot wounds he suffered during a shootout in September. India is trying to get the don extradited to face 17 counts of murder and other mob-related charges.

Thai police, who believe Rajan is still in Thailand, have sounded an alert and flashed his pictures at all checkpoints.

Thailand's deputy immigration police chief, Maj-Gen. Charnvuth Watcharapongse said the two officers and the five guards would be questioned. "We are investigating every officer there and some hospital workers and doctors....We are suspicious of everyone."

Rajan was injured in September when Dawood Ibrahim's henchmen barged into an apartment of his associate Michael D'souza and fired at them.

**Mumbai alert:** Security was beefed up in sensitive areas of Mumbai today following reports of Rajan's escape. Senior officers held a closed-door meeting to prepare a strategy in case there was a spurt in underworld killings.

THE STATESMAN

25 NOV 2000

## Chota Rajan

28<sup>th</sup> shifted 10-1

**BANGKOK, SEPT. 22.** Thai authorities have shifted the underworld don, Chota Rajan, to an undisclosed destination from a local hospital where he was undergoing treatment for gunshot injuries sustained in an attack even as one of the arrested assailants vowed to hunt down and kill him within three months.

Sikandi Hama, who was also injured in the attack in which her jeweller husband Rohit d'Souza was killed last Friday at the couple's apartment, and Chota Rajan were shifted from the hospital after an "unknown" Indian tried to visit them there, *The Bangkok Post* reported today.

Another English daily, *The Nation*, quoted one of the four gunmen arrested in connection with the shooting as saying they would kill Rajan in three months.

"Rajan is our enemy. He is a drug-dealer, he cheated my boss Shakeel Bhai. So he has to die," Mohamad Salim, one of the three Pakistanis arrested along with a Thai national, told the newspaper.

"Rajan is lucky, but he will be killed by my gang within three months. Let's wait and see," the daily quoted him as saying.

He claimed that the Indian jeweller was an informant of Chota Shakeel, a close aide of Dubai-based mafia leader Dawood Ibrahim. Salim said his group had decided to eliminate Chota Rajan after a tip-off from D'Souza that Rajan would be in the jeweller's apartment on Friday, the day of the shooting. They did not find Rajan there. "One of our team men lost his temper thinking D'Souza had betrayed us, so he shot him," Salim said.

Police said the four gangsters still at large were believed to be in Thailand's Suphan Buri with a group of Thai Muslim gunmen led by a man named Bai Khan. The group reportedly includes several Indians, *The Nation* said. "The Bai Khan group is powerful in Suphan Buri province. We believe the hitmen could be with them because the Bai Khan group is suspected to have supplied them with weapons," a senior police source told the daily adding the rest of the Shakeel gang had fled the country.

Salim, who had told police earlier that Chota Shakeel had offered the gunmen Rs. 4 crore to kill Rajan, however, told *The Nation* that the attack was part of "duty". "I did it for my gang. I would have received no money for the killing and if my activity here was completed successfully I would not be given any reward." "However, I do not feel sorry for attempting to kill Rajan. He is a bad man," Salim said.

He said Mohammad Yusuf, a Pakistani, had nothing to do with the murder attempt and added that he had met Yusuf in Bangkok and found that he was a Pakistani and had asked for help in finding an apartment for the gang. Earlier reports had said that Yusuf had led the attack. — PTI

28<sup>th</sup> shifted 10-1

28<sup>th</sup> shifted 10-1

23 SEP 2000

# 'Unwilling' voters queue up for crucial Thailand elections

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
BANGKOK, MARCH 4

to be held under a new "people's  
constitution" framed in 1997 and

Millions of Thais poured into polling stations on Saturday for upper house elections in a crucial first test of a new constitution designed to purge the rampant corruption that has tainted democracy

here for decades.

Poll venues were submerged by streams of voters, many of whom had headed out of Bangkok on packed public transport to return home for the compulsory vote.

But by the time voting started there were already reports of fraud and indications that the bid to stamp out vote-buying may have been in vain. The polls will send 200 representatives in the Senate, which will wield new powers to examine legislation and impeach the government. It is the first election



A Thai woman votes at a Bangkok polling station on Saturday --AFP

intended to make politics more democratic, transparent and less prone to corruption.

For the first time, the state is using strong-arm tactics to ensure a good turnout. People who fail to vote will be stripped of the eligibility for future elections and will

be barred for running for parliament. Thousands of disgruntled people queued at Bangkok bus and train terminals overnight amid misconceptions that failure to vote would cost them their right to use the public health service.

New laws make it illegal for candidates to do much more than introduce themselves to the public, and, officially at least, political parties have been barred from organising campaigns.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 5 MAR 2000

# Thai forces storm hospital, free hostages

RATCHABURI: Ending a 22-hour standoff, Thai security forces stormed a hospital on Tuesday and killed 10 heavily armed insurgents from a Myanmar rebel group who had trapped hundreds of patients, visitors and staff there as hostages.

Lt. Gen. Thawee Suwannasingha, the regional Thai army commander, told reporters that all the captives were freed unharmed. Two police officers were wounded.

"It was a successful operation," Lt. Gen. Thawee said. "The patients in the hospital needed help. I'm happy all the hostages are safe."

The captors were members of God's Army, a fringe rebel group from the ethnic Karen minority that is fighting in neighbouring Myanmar and led by twin 12-year-old boys.

The twins, believed by their followers to have magical powers, were not involved in the takeover at the hospital.

On Monday, the hostage-takers had demanded that Thailand grant refuge to Myanmar civilians and the rebel combatants and stop shelling their positions along the Thai border.

Last week, the rebels were attacked inside Myanmar by government forces in fighting that drove 1,000 refugees into Thailand. Thai forces shelled rebel positions to deter them from coming across.

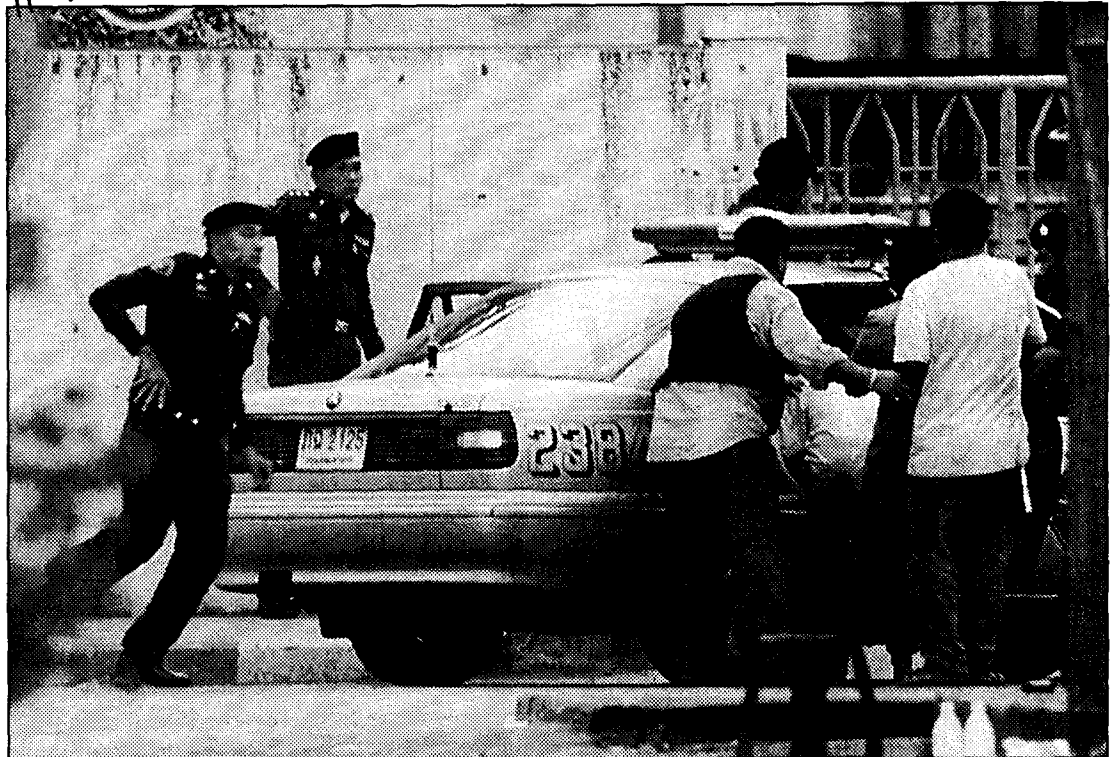
Thai officials first said on Tuesday that nine captors were killed and one was believed missing. But later all 10 of their bodies were displayed in front of the hospital wrapped in white cloth. At least six of the corpses appeared to be bleeding from their heads.

In the past, Thai police have been known to kill violent criminals in cold blood after their capture or surrender. Anticipating possible criticism about how the handling of the crisis at the hospital, the regional police commander, Lt. Gen. Anant Heamathanong, said all of the hostage-takers had died in fighting and none had been executed. He said nine had died at the scene and the tenth during a gun battle after fleeing. He gave no other details.

Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai called the pre-dawn operation "very successful" and condemned the captors. Phone calls poured in to radio stations to congratulate the armed forces. An estimated 900 people had been trapped when the gunmen first seized control of the hospital on Monday morning.

But at least half of them had been freed by their captors or escaped during the day and overnight before the assault was launched before dawn on Tuesday.

In the hours before the attack, reporters were steadily moved back



The special police storm a hospital at Ratchaburi in Thailand on Tuesday after Myanmar Karen rebels seized it and held about 500 people hostage for 24 hours. (Below) A father carries his child past a glass door with a bullet hole in it.

from the hospital to a stadium across the road. They took cover as explosions and shooting erupted but could see the police and soldiers armed with M-16 assault rifles running on foot and speeding in trucks and jeeps into the walled, 2.4-hectare hospital compound. Automatic weapons fire and explosions thudded through the night skies, possibly from grenades or explosives and mines that the hostage-takers had rigged around the hospital. Sporadic gunfire was heard for an hour. After the area was secured, explosives experts with mine detectors combed the compound seeking booby-traps. Ambulances drove in and began ferrying exhausted, weeping survivors to another hospital for medical checks.

Pun im-Uerb, 61, whose son escaped from a post-operation ward on Monday afternoon, a day after having his appendix removed, said the rebels deserved to die but predicted that other ones might take revenge. Boonmak Sirinavakul, a local member of Parliament, said the government had had no choice but to take tough action because if the standoff had dragged a few more days patients could have died.

Thai authorities had said just before the assault that they wanted to solve the takeover through negotiations. The hostage-takers had been in control of the five-story central administration and emergency room buildings, but couldn't extend control over eight outlying buildings. It was not known how many



people were held directly at gunpoint during the siege, though officials guessed it might have been 200.

Like many Karens, the followers

of God's Army are fundamentalist Christians in a predominantly Buddhist country. They accuse Myanmar's military regime of waging a reign of terror. (AP)

# Thai hostages freed after 22-hr standoff

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## ASSOCIATED PRESS

RATCHABURI (Thailand), Jan. 25. — Ending a 22-hour hostage standoff, Thai security forces today stormed a hospital and killed nine armed members of a Myanmar rebel group called God's Army who had trapped hundreds of patients, visitors and staff.

All the hostages were freed unharmed but two police officers were wounded, said the regional Thai army commander, Lt Gen Thawee Suwannasingha. *S. Suwannasingha*  
"As far as I know, nine hostage-takers were killed...in fighting with us," Lt Gen Thawee said, "it was a successful operation. The patients in the hospital needed help. I'm happy all the hostages are safe."

A 10th gunman had been hunted down and killed, according to Thai media but the report could not be immediately confirmed. Lt Gen Thawee discounted earlier government reports that there were 16 gunmen.

Prime Minister, Mr Chuan Leekpai condemned the hostage takers and said the pre-dawn operation was very successful.

Around 900 people had been trapped when the gunmen seized control of the hospital, yesterday, but at least half of



The bodies of Myanmar rebels killed in a Thai commando raid on the Ratchaburi hospital on Tuesday. — APIPTI

them were either freed or escaped during the day and overnight.

Few hours before the attack, reporters were moved back from the hospital to a stadium across the road. Police and soldiers armed with M-16 assault rifles sped into the hospital compound on foot and in trucks, jeeps, firing and explosions followed.

After the area was secured, explosives experts combed the hospital premises. Ambulances

took the exhausted, weeping survivors to another hospital for medical check-up.

Mr Decha Yuwang, 32, said he was admitting his mother to the hospital yesterday morning when the masked gunmen burst in and rounded up 80-90 patients, medical staff.

The hostages were taken to a small room in the out-patient department and told politely that they wouldn't be hurt.

Shortly before dawn, the hostages heard an explosion.

"Everybody hit the floor," said Mr Yuwang, "they crawled behind cabinets, hid in corners, screaming, crying."

The rebels told the hostages to stay low. Soon, gunshots shattered the top windows and the captors fired back. Two of the rebels were hit by bullets, Mr Yuwang said.

"I was frozen with fear ... there was firing in all directions," he said.

Mrs Pun Im-ueb, 61, whose son escaped from a post-op

ward, yesterday, said the rebels deserved to die but predicted others might take revenge.

"They put the lives of others at risk for their own sake ... it's not right, and especially since they are not Thais. It's a good lesson for them," she said.

The government had no choice but to take tough action, said Mr Boonmak Sirinavakul, a member of Parliament, if the standoff had dragged on, patients could have died.

Thai authorities said two hours before the assault they wanted to solve the take-over through negotiations without using force.

**Lesson for rebels:** The killing of the nine hostage-takers should serve as a stiff warning to other guerrillas, Thailand said today, adds Reuters.

"The raid is a statement from Thailand that guerrillas can no longer do this kind of thing to us. If you are hurt and need medical treatment we are happy to help. But we won't stand sieges," said Mr Prasong Soonsiri, national security adviser to the Prime Minister.

The nation's intelligence gathering operations need to be reviewed, he said.

**Myanmar praise:** Myanmar's military government praised Thailand for putting a "decisive" end to the siege on the Thai hospital.

THAILAND / KAREN REBELS KILLED

HP-16

# All hostages freed in pre-dawn swoop

By P. S. Suryanarayana

**SINGAPORE, JAN. 25.** In a pre-dawn raid today, Thailand's elite commandos stormed the hospital and released all the hostages held there by 10 terrorists of the 'God's Army' in the Ratchaburi province. Nine terrorists were killed in the operation by Thailand's military and other security personnel. The other hostage-taker was later shot dead as he fled.

Several hundred persons — patients, doctors and others — had been held hostage by the masked gunmen for nearly 24 hours. There were no indications of injuries to any of the hostages as a direct result of the commando assault, though at least one Thai military official was hurt in the operation against the group, a splinter faction of the Karen National Union fighting the military government in Myanmar. The freed patients were shifted to nearby hospitals.

As details of the successful operation were announced by Thailand's Prime Minister, Mr. Chuan Leekpai, its military and civilian officials, it won the appreciation of the Yangon regime, which had been cross with him for the handling of the seizure of the Myanmarese embassy in Bangkok last October. On that occasion, the hostages were freed only after the gunmen, belonging to a Myanmarese pro-democracy student faction, were allowed a safe passage out of Thailand, with the Thai Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, acting both as their escort and their prize proxy-hostage.

In contrast, a point of much significance to Yangon was that the

meeting in the town between the Mr. Chuan and top military commanders.

It is understood that the primary political consideration was that the hospital could not be equated with the Myanmarese embassy which by definition was not treated as Thailand's territory for purpose of a commando-style rescue operation. The Thai Prime Minister's Security Adviser said that "hospitals are supposed to be free and safe even during war-time" and that "nobody takes hospitals hostage."

The Thai authorities initially placed a high premium on the safety of the hostages, with the Army Chief, Gen. Surayudh Chulanont, saying that an attempt would be made to "negotiate" with the gunmen by "focusing on the safety of the hostages." However, the strong resentment among the Thais who felt that the Myanmarese rebels were abusing Bangkok's humanitarian approach towards them led to the action. The Thai security forces entered the hospital in the guise of medical personnel and prepared the ground for the strike, according to officials in Bangkok.

Earlier, during talks with the rebel group, the Thai authorities indicated their 'willingness' to allow the wounded Karen rebels and refugees to cross into Thailand for medication. But the Thais refused to give the hostage-takers a safe passage and two helicopters for that purpose. Bangkok also maintained that its military personnel were not engaged in a policy of shelling the Karen rebels on the Myanmar side of the border.



**A NIGHTMARE ENDS: A shaken hostage (center), is helped to a waiting ambulance by a military policeman and a police officer, after commandos raided the hospital seized by armed Karen guerillas in Ratchaburi province southwest of Bangkok on Tuesday. — AP**

Thai authorities succeeded in killing the hostage-takers who belonged to a group that had given shelter to those involved in the earlier seizure of the Myanmarese embassy in Bangkok. It was not

The raid followed a late-night

# Did Karen rebels surrender?

<sup>HD-16 271</sup>  
**BANGKOK, JAN. 26.** Thailand has defended the dawn raid by commandos which ended the 24-hour occupation of a hospital by heavily-armed Myanmar rebels in a sustained hail of gunfire on Tuesday.

None of the hundreds of patients, relatives and staff inside when the black-clad troops stormed Ratchaburi Hospital was injured despite the 40 minutes of heavy gunfire. But all 10 insurgents from God's Army, an ethnic Karen rebel group, were killed either during or, as some eyewitnesses suggested, soon after the assault.

The Thai government is facing embarrassing questions about how the intruders managed to cross the border, seize a bus and reach Ratchaburi without

being stopped by the police, despite being dressed in military fatigues and laden with weaponry.

Adding to the controversy, some of the freed hostages have suggested that some of the raiders died, not in the heat of battle but were shot dead afterwards.

Several hostages said they saw some of the rebels trying to surrender. "I saw one taken by commandos out of the room where I was hiding with his arms

up holding his gun above his head," said a woman who had been visiting a relative when the hospital was seized at 7 am on Monday.

Others said they saw a gunman injured and unable to move unassisted.

The Thai Prime Minister, Mr. Chuan Leekpai, said the authorities had not wanted violence, but it had been unavoidable. "As long as our neighbours still have problems and refugees still cross (into Thailand) we may not be able to avoid facing this sort of problem," he said.

<sup>S to Asia -</sup>  
"These people have conflicts with the Myanmar Government. We are in a difficult position because they were forced out of the border area adjoining our territory."

The head of the Thai National Security Council said the only way to prevent a repeat was to speed the resettlement in third countries of thousands of Myanmar dissidents living in Thailand.

The regional police commander, Lt-Gen Anant Heamathanong, said all the rebels died during the assault, and that none had been "executed". Nine died initially and one later on, he said.

Six hours after the siege ended, their bodies were laid outside an entrance tied up in heavy white cloth.



**A security guard stands watch outside a bullet-ridden building as army investigation officials patrol the premises of the Ratchaburi Hospital on Wednesday. Thai commandos had stormed the hospital earlier in a rescue mission, killing all 10 terrorists. — AP**

Four or five had heavy bloodstains around the head and nowhere else.

The decision to attack was taken only after negotiations failed, said a Foreign Ministry spokesman. "We tried our best to be reasonable, but it failed. This is a clear message from Thailand that we won't tolerate terrorism," said Don Pramudwinai. "They (God's Army) might not be the most ferocious group, but when you are dealing with ter-

rorists you have to aim for the maximum result. We hope never to have this sort of incident again."

God's Army is led by 12-year-old twin boys with supposedly invincible powers. It is a splinter group of the Karen National Union, which has been fighting for autonomy from Burma for 50 years.

Hostages said they were never threatened and when the firing started some rebels told them to lie down and get out of harm's way. — © *Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2000*