

## Court clears Thai PM of charges

BANGKOK, Aug. 3. - Thailand's constitutional court has cleared Prime Minister Mr Thaksin Shinawatra of charges that he deliberately concealed assets, judges said today, ending months of uncertainty and allowing him to carry on in the job.



Thaksin on Friday. judges said today, ending months of uncertainty and allowing him to carry on in the job.

Mr Kramol Thongthammachat, judge, told reporters the court had ruled that Mr Shinawatra had not deliberately concealed some of his wealth during the 1990s. Had he been found guilty, he would have faced a five-year ban from politics.

Local television quoted judges as saying the court had voted 8-7 in favour of clearing him. - Reuters

- 4 AUG 2001

# Under fire, Advani tells J&K to enact anti-terrorist law

Times News Network and Agencies

NEW DELHI: Amidst strident criticism by MPs for the government's failure to prevent a string of recent massacres in Jammu and Kashmir, home minister L.K. Advani on Thursday told the Lok Sabha that the state government would be asked to consider the enactment of an anti-terrorist law to deal with militancy.

He said measures in accordance with the law would be stepped up against "overground supporters" of terrorists. Special intelligence-driven security force operations based on surprise and speed would also be considered, Mr Advani said, speaking on a calling attention motion on the recent Doda killings.

Mr Advani's statement did little to satisfy a vociferous opposition which accused him of failure to anticipate the renewal of terrorist violence after the collapsed Musharraf summit and of taking adequate measures.

Asked repeatedly by Congress members whether chief minister Farooq Abdullah had demanded more forces after the summit breakdown, Mr Advani avoided giving a direct reply. He said that since demands had been made by various states, it was not possible for the Centre to meet all of them.

Congress deputy leader Madhavrao Scindia and chief whip P.R. Das Munshi insisted on knowing whether Mr Abdullah had asked for more forces, to which the home minister said, "We have tried to meet the demands of the Jammu

and Kashmir chief minister." When the Congress members' repeated queries failed to evoke a definite response from the home minister, the opposition, led by the Congress, staged a walk-out.

Earlier, seeking clarifications, opposition members reminded Mr Advani of his pledge to quit if he failed to contain militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. "Did the unilateral ceasefire result in de-escalation of militancy?" Raghvans Prasad Singh of the RJD asked. He wanted to know if the government had any statistics regarding the number of terrorists from foreign

Jaipal Reddy said the package of measures announced by Mr Advani contained nothing substantive. He clarified that his party was not opposed to the extension of the two acts to other areas, but asked if such a move would prove effective in Jammu considering it had not been effective in the Valley.

In Srinagar, the Jammu and Kashmir cabinet passed a resolution declaring four districts of the Jammu region "disturbed" after the governor approved the resolution adopted by the cabinet.

The chief minister said the four districts—Jammu, Udhampur, Doda and Kathua—would come under the ambit of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Meanwhile the indefinite curfew imposed in Jammu city following the railway station carnage was lifted at 4 p.m. on Thursday, "until further orders", which means it will be reimposed "if there is need for it", a police spokesperson said.

Two more persons, including a woman, succumbed to their injuries, bringing the death toll to 13, an official spokesperson said.

There was no relaxation in the curfew in Kishtwar town of Doda district on Thursday as tension mounted following rival bandh calls given by the two communities. While one community had given a call in protest against the Jammu railway station carnage, the other community gave the call to protest what it called "firing at the mosque at Paddar" in Kishtwar tehsil. The Kishtwar police, however, said that the mosque was safe.

## SECURITY MEASURES



- ▶ Advani announces special steps to tackle terrorist attacks
- ▶ Drive against overground supporters of terrorism to be stepped up
- ▶ J&K cabinet passes Disturbed Areas Act

countries who were active in the troubled state. Questions were also asked about the sharp criticism by civil aviation minister Chamanlal Gupta about the role of the J&K government and the demand for the chief minister's resignation.

Mr Advani argued that the recent killing spree by militants was an expression of their frustration after the "success" achieved by security forces in combating terrorism in the past three months. "We have won all the wars with Pakistan, now we will win the ongoing proxy war," he said.

Later, Congress spokesperson

MURDER MYSTERY IN GOREGAON'S GALA NO. 13

# Thaksin case is major test for Thailand democracy

By ERIN PRELYPCHAN

**Bangkok, June 19:** Thai newspapers said on Tuesday that Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's tearful appeal to a court considering graft charges against him was a hit with his adoring public — but also a key test of the country's democracy.

All three English-language dailies said in opinion pieces after Monday's testimony by Mr Thaksin that the constitutional court's decision, expected by August, would be a watershed for Thailand's democracy.

"We will soon find out if the law applies to everyone in Thailand," *Business Day's* managing editor said in a front-page opinion piece, adding that the court should be allowed to make its ruling without pressure and based on what the law says.

"This is the system against the individual, and it will have far-reaching implications," the *Nation* said in an editorial. "The court's verdict will serve as a barometer of the maturity of our political system and the quality of its citizens."

Mr Thaksin told the court that an "honest mistake" led him to make an incomplete assets declaration. The court must decide whether to uphold a national counter corruption commission ruling that he deliberately failed to declare some of his assets in obligatory statements made when he was deputy prime minister in 1997. (Reuters)



**BOMB SCARE:** Thai bomb experts tell the press to disperse as they attempt to defuse a bomb inside the grounds of the Vietnam embassy in Bangkok on Tuesday. Two bombs, containing a total of about 10 kg of explosives, were defused. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

20 JUN 2001

# Between power and wilderness

**W**HEN MR. Thaksin Shinwatra won the January 6 general elections in Thailand, the Prime Minister-designate was aware that he had another, bigger hurdle to cross — a corruption indictment.

Usually, for politicians, elections are the insurmountable barrier between power and wilderness; but in Mr. Thaksin's case his pre-poll indictment before the Constitutional Court on charges of misdeclaring his assets could prove to be a much bigger hurdle.

A telecom tycoon, said to be wealthiest man in Thailand, Mr. Thaksin's indictment is a litmus test for the country's new anti-corruption mechanisms.

His Thai Ra Thai (Thais Love Thais) party swept the polls on its own — a definite feat in the country's coalition-dominated politics.

Along with the inevitability of the trial in the Constitutional Court, Mr. Thaksin also faces the rising expectations of the Thai people — promised many goodies in a country where poverty levels are rising.

Apart from his other schemes, Mr. Thaksin had promised 1 million baht for every village — a populist enterprise certain to be frowned upon by the world's economic manager-cum-pundits, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

As the Prime Minister moves to implement some of his promises, he has already indicated that the country's economy was a shambles; a point that has been contested by the erstwhile ruling Democrats.

In a recent speech dubbed "Truth about Thailand", Mr. Thaksin revealed that the country's national debt had hit 2.8 trillion baht (about \$64 billions) or 58 per cent of GDP, with foreign exchange reserves plunging from 400 billion baht to 13 billion baht.

Referring to poverty levels, the Prime Minister said the country had 10 million poor people as opposed to 7.5 million before the 1997 economic crisis. He also pointed to the poor state of the manufacturing industry.

"We have to think together to solve our problems. We must not create new ones. If we work together, I don't think there is anything which cannot be overcome," he was quoted as saying.

As a votary of the alliance between business and politics, Mr. Thaksin has been by and large well received, but the corruption charges had placed a big question mark over his

continuation in office even before the people went to the polls.

That the Thai people voted for the man and his party despite the indictment by the National Counter-Corruption Commission (NCCC) could turn into a complicating factor.

For Mr. Thaksin, the mandate should not be seen as a recourse to disrespect for the Constitutional Court. While an acquittal is possible, there is also a strong possibility that the Prime Minister could be disqualified from holding public office for five years.

Earlier in the week, the trial in the Constitutional Court commenced. Leading the charge against the Prime

guards". None of these individuals attended a shareholders' meeting or received any income from the "holding" of these shares, the prosecution submitted.

According to the NCCC official, one particular share transfer took place to a member of Mr. Thaksin's household three years after the person had died.

Mr. Klanarong said Mr. Thaksin's claim that he was not aware of the transfers was "unbelievable". He claimed that the Prime Minister made such share transfers before he came into politics in 1992 and continued to do so until 1998, when he ceased to be a Minister.

relationships with some Democratic Party members.

"With many of the (NCCC) commissioners close to the Democrats, this has resulted in questions being raised over its impartiality and discriminatory procedures against the defendant," Mr. Suthee argued.

However, Mr. Klanarong responded by saying that the NCCC had shown its political neutrality by indicting General Sanan Kachornprasart, former Interior Minister and a leading light of the Democrat Party, forcing him to take retirement from politics.

"Don't introduce politics into this Court," Mr. Klanarong told Mr. Suthee.

Commenting on his lawyers' performance, Mr. Thaksin conceded that they had put up a lacklustre defence. However, the Prime Minister said that he had no intention of sacking his legal team in this high-stake case.

"My lawyers will have to find a new strategy, that's all," the Prime Minister told reporters in Bangkok on Thursday.

According to Mr. Thaksin, he would not let himself be distracted by the Court case despite the disappointing performance by his legal team.

"I will devote myself to the work of the country. I don't worry about the future," the Prime Minister said.

An editorial in the Bangkok daily, *The Nation*, said that the legal battle, which could last up to a year, was diverting attention from some of the pressing issues in the country.

"The economic woes and the courtroom drama will be around for quite some time. It will be hard for the country if Thaksin loses the battle on either of these fronts," the paper said.

Mr. Thaksin has been welcomed by the people as Prime Minister; with many Thais reposing their faith in him. However, the Prime Minister is aware that his fate is in the hands of the judges of the Constitutional Court and not the electorate.

Despite his popularity, Mr. Thaksin should be aware that the only way to strengthen democratic institutions is to respect the rule of law.

The temptation of harking back to the people's mandate is, of course, a strong one, but is best resisted in democratic environments.

While an acquittal would spare Thailand and Mr. Thaksin the need to find a new Head of Government, the Prime Minister would do well to think in terms of looking around for a possible successor in the months to come.



The Thal Prime Minister, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra... in the shadow of an indictment.

Minister, Mr. Klanarong Chanthick, NCCC secretary-general, told the Court that Mr. Thaksin had acted "dishonestly and untransparently" in the transfer of shares.

Mr. Thaksin is charged with concealing his income in an official statement when Minister in a previous Government. Shares worth millions of baht were said to have been circulated among his staff and did not show up in the income statement submitted by Mr. Thaksin.

Mr. Klanarong argued that Mr. Thaksin transferred a large number of his and his wife's shares "back and forth among his maids, his babysitters, drivers and security

The NCCC is also of the view that some share transfers violated disclosure laws and that both Mr. Thaksin and his wife avoided paying taxes through the use of nominees.

In response, a lawyer for the Prime Minister, Mr. Suthee Damnuadee, stated that the NCCC had a hidden agenda and acted hastily in preparing the indictment against Mr. Thaksin.

Rather than responding to specific points made by the prosecution, Mr. Thaksin's lawyer essentially argued that the NCCC was biased and favoured the Opposition Democrats.

Mr. Suthee displayed a newspaper report claiming that some members of the NCCC had close personal

**Mr. Thaksin Shinwatra's pre-poll indictment before the Constitutional Court on charges of misdeclaring his assets could prove a big hurdle, says Amit Baruah.**

# Thai PM says bomb caused plane fire

BANGKOK: Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra on Sunday said a bomb was responsible for a fire which gutted a Thai airways flight he was about to board.

"The incident was caused by an explosive device and was not an accident," he told journalists in the northern city of Chiang Mai, referring to Saturday's incident in a Bangkok domestic airport.

One person was killed and seven others injured when the Thai Airways International Boeing 737-400 bound for city of Chiang Mai exploded in flames on the tarmac at Bangkok's domestic airport.

"From the official report the blast went off under the seat," he said without elaborating.

Airline ground staff and a close aide to Mr Thaksin said they believed a bomb had gone off under two seats in business class of plane which had been reserved for the prime minister and his son.

Mr Thaksin said he would meet top police officials later on Sunday and discuss the incident and possible security threats.

Thai armed forces supreme commander Sampao Choosri said the investigation results may be known by this evening, but that intelligence agencies had been caught off guard by the incident.

"There were no intelligence reports on a planned assassination attempt on prime minister," he said.

Mr Sampao said it was possible there had been a mechanical fault on the plane, but acknowledged



Investigators examine the remains of a Thai Airways Boeing jetliner at international airport in Bangkok on Sunday.

airline officials heard a loud explosion and that the engines were off at the time.

If the investigation report concludes the blast was a bomb aimed at Mr Thaksin, it would make him the first Thai prime minister to be the target of an assassination attempt since the early 1980s.

Mr Thaksin, who was Thailand's

richest businessman having made a fortune in the telecoms sector, took office last month after his party won January elections.

Thai Airways president Bhisit Kuslasayanon said a loud explosion was heard just before the fire broke out and that the plane's engines were off at the time.

"A loud noise was heard, like an explosion. It was heard by many

people," he said.

Mr Bhisit said some of the plane's luggage had been loaded at the time of the explosion and fire, but passenger boarding had not yet begun.

The fire broke out on the plane as it was being serviced ahead of passenger boarding. Airline officials said they were running about half an hour behind schedule. (AFP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

5 MAR 2001

# Close shave for Thai PM in burning plane

FROM VISSUTA POTHONG

**Bangkok, March 3** (Reuters): Newly elected Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had a narrow escape today when a Thai Airways Boeing 737 he was due to board burst into flames minutes before taking on passengers at Bangkok airport.

One person died in the fire, which engulfed the aircraft on the tarmac close to the airport's domestic terminal, an airline spokesman told reporters. Another five people, mostly members of the crew, were also injured in the blaze.

Flight TG 114 had been due to fly to the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai from Bangkok's Don Muang International Airport

with 149 passengers, including Thaksin, his son and 20 government officials as well as flight crew.

The Prime Minister was waiting in the airport's VIP room when the fire started.

"It is the plane I was going to board," Thaksin told reporters. "Personally, I am not alarmed by the situation, but I am surprised it happened to a plane that was ready to take off."

All Thai domestic flights to and from Bangkok were suspended but international flights were unaffected, local radio said.

The cause of the fire was not immediately clear.

Witnesses said they heard an explosion before the aircraft was hit. Some said

the plane had been refuelling when the fire started, but this could not be confirmed by airline officials.

A Thai Airways official said the fire had broken out at 2.48 pm (12.20pm IST), 12 minutes before the plane was due to depart.

The fire was put out in an hour, local radio said.

Television footage showed pictures of the aircraft reduced to a blackened steel frame. Part of its roof had collapsed and the only undamaged part was a section of the tail.

Asked whether a bomb could have caused the explosion, Thaksin told reporters no one should jump to conclusions. "It is still not known what caused the fire," he said.

# Thailand seals key checkpoint

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAE SAI (Thailand), Feb. 13. — Thailand today closed a key border checkpoint and sent troop reinforcements following heavy fighting with Myanmar when this border town came under mortar attack.

Colonel. Wanthip Wongwai of Thailand's Pha Muang border task force said Myanmar sent "heavy reinforcements into the area" and "we are also doing that to ensure the security and sovereignty of the nation."

"The situation has become more tense," he said.

The fighting, the worst between the two countries in several years, presents the first diplomatic crisis to Thai Prime Minister Mr Thaksin Shinawatra, who said yesterday he would visit Myanmar soon to improve relations.

The Thai Army said hundreds of troops were deployed along a mountainous stretch of the frontier.

Two armored personnel car-

riers and dozens of armed troops were posted at the checkpoint between Mae Sai and the Myanmar town of Tachilek.

The checkpoint, one of three principal crossing points along the more than 2,000 km-long Thai-Myanmar frontier was closed on Sunday when the fighting started.

It reopened yesterday when Thai and Myanmar forces agreed on a ceasefire. However, it was closed again early today.

Two women were killed and seven other civilians injured by Myanmar mortar shells that landed on Sunday at Mae Sai, at the northernmost tip of Thailand, about 720 km from Bangkok. There were no military casualties.

The fighting started near Tachilek between Myanmar government forces and anti-government Shan rebels and spilled into Thailand as Myanmar forces tried to take over vantage points in Thai soil to target rebels.

THE STATESMAN

10 FEB 2011

# Thaksin begins search for Finance Minister

**BANGKOK, JAN. 8.** Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, who is set to form Thailand's next Government, began the search on Monday for a Finance Minister who will inherit the toughest job in his new administration.

Mr. Thaksin, whose Thai Rak Thai (Thais love Thai) party won an unprecedented landslide in Saturday's election, told reporters he is mulling four candidates for the job, some from inside and some from outside his party. He refused to elaborate.

Thailand's new finance chief will have to walk a political and economic tightrope while balancing the twin aims of Mr. Thaksin's party — following liberal fiscal policies to pull the country out of a 3 1/2-year-old economic quagmire while initiating big spending programmes to fulfill Mr. Thaksin's campaign promises.

His pledges included spending 1 million baht (\$ 23,255) for each of Thailand's 77,000 villages, a three-year farming sector debt moratorium and setting up a state asset management company to bail out banks from their bad debt totalling 1.1 trillion baht.

"The person who will become Finance Minister will have a tough job," Mr. Thaksin (51), said. "He will step into the Ministry right at the time it's running out of money." The candidates whose names have been mentioned privately include the Central Bank Governor, Mr. Chatu Mongkol Sonakul and the Export-Import Bank of Thailand president, Mr. Pridiyatorn Devakula.

In his three years as Governor, Mr. Chatu Mongkol has shown commitment to strong monetary discipline, which might clash with some of the electoral promises of Thai Rak Thai.



**Angry Thai villagers chant slogans during a protest against alleged fraud vote counting outside Thailand's Election Commission office in Bangkok on Monday. About 200 villagers took part in the protest and called on the Commission to order a recounting of vote at their constituency in Rayong province, 145 km south**

A third candidate, Mr. Kosit Panpiemras, ruled himself out on Monday, saying he has no political aspirations. Mr. Kosit is the executive chairman of Bangkok Bank Plc, Thailand's largest bank, and is a former Finance Minister.

Mr. Thaksin said if nobody took up the post, he might head the Ministry himself.

According to unofficial results, Thai Rak Thai party won 257 of the 500 seats in the House of Representatives, trailed by the Democrats of the Prime Minister, Mr. Chuan Leekpai, with 125 seats.

If the results are confirmed, it would be the first time a party would have won an absolute majority in Thailand where coalition

governments have been the norm.

But Mr. Thaksin, the billionaire founder of Thailand's biggest telecommunications conglomerate, has indicated that despite the majority, he would form a coalition to shore up his parliamentary strength to 320 seats to block censure motions. A parliamentary censure motion needs the backing of at least 200 lawmakers before it can be initiated.

He said the shape of his coalition should be clear by Thursday, and would consist of three parties he did not name. He has one month to announce the coalition.

Despite his convincing victory, Mr. Thaksin's future as Prime Minister could be short-lived if the Constitutional Court rules against him in a corruption case. A verdict is expected in a few months. If it goes against him, Mr. Thaksin would be barred from holding a public office for five years.

Mr. Thaksin said he was not unduly worried about the case and instead noted that foreign and local investors have expressed support for the election result by pumping in more money in the stock market.

Meanwhile, Thailand's Election Commission said that a spate of protests over vote counts in several constituencies was causing delays in announcing final results.

It said repolling would be held in four constituencies on Saturday, and eventually byelections could be held in one quarter of constituencies or more where there is evidence of fraud or malpractice by candidates. — AP

THE HINDI

9 JAN 2001



# Thaksin swiftly working on Govt. formation

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**BANGKOK, THAILAND** Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, winner in Thailand's general election, was moving swiftly on Sunday to shape a coalition lineup, but local television stations indicated his party might be able to form a government on its own.

Two television stations monitoring exit polls said Mr. Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai, or Thai Love Thai, party had captured 256 of the 500 seats in the lower House of Parliament. This would give the party a majority.

But Mr. Thaksin, a telecommunications tycoon charged with corruption, has said he wanted a majority of about 320 seats to form a stable government.

Despite a strong drive to eradicate graft in recent years, Saturday's election appeared to show that Thais preferred the scandal-tainted Thaksin to Mr. Chuan Leekpai, the scrupulously honest but uninspiring Prime Minister whose success in improving the troubled economy has been spotty.

"If the official results are in line with the exit polls, I regard them as the people's mandate for me to work for the nation, and I will do my best not to disappoint the people," Mr. Thaksin said Saturday night.

Earlier exit polls conducted by three television stations indicated Mr. Thaksin's party captured at least 203 and possibly 241 of the parliamentary seats.

Mr. Chuan's Democrat Party was projected to come in second, with 109 to 135 seats. The projections were based on information gathered by reporters, pollsters and non-governmental organizations.

"We are ready to be the Opposition party," said Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, deputy leader of the Democrats.

An Election Commission official told reporters that national results should be announced on Monday night, except for four constituencies where balloting problems stopped the voting. Some official results are expected on Sunday.

Despite a record turnout estimated at 70 percent of the nation's 43 million voters, the balloting was marred by reportedly massive cheating. The watchdog Election Commission said it had received a flood of complaints that could lead to disqualification or revotes for some 100 winners.

Mr. Thaksin said he would discuss forming a government coalition with the New Aspiration and Chart Thai parties, projected to finish third and fifth respectively with about 50 Parliament seats each.

Cobbling a coalition government is not the only challenge Mr. Thaksin faces: his future as Prime Minister hinges on the Constitutional Court, which could throw him out of office for corruption.

The National Counter Corruption Commission ruled last month that Mr. Thaksin concealed some of his wealth by transferring stock shares to his maid and driver while serving in a previous government. If the Constitutional Court upholds the ruling, Mr. Thaksin will be barred from public office for five years.

The court's verdict may not come for several

months, and Mr. Thaksin has vowed to take office even if he has to step down soon. During the campaign, he rejected calls to withdraw from the race because of his uncertain future.

Mr. Thaksin, a 51-year-old billionaire, spent heavily on a slick campaign with heavy populist and nationalist overtones. He also promises to spend lavishly to kick-start the economy when he comes into power, but how he will come by the money in cash-short Thailand remains unclear.

Many voters complained they were bored with Mr. Chuan, Thailand's longest-serving civilian Prime Minister, who took office in November 1997 in the depths of the Asian financial crisis. Others said he had failed to improve the lot of the rural poor and create jobs for the urban unemployed. — AP

THE HINDU

8 JAN 2001

# Tycoon set to be Thai PM

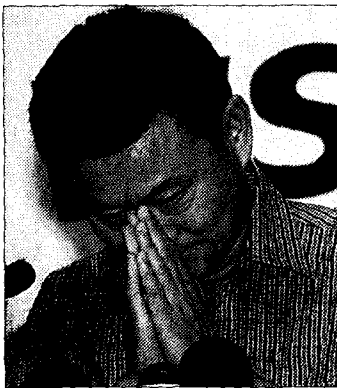
REUTERS

BANGKOK, Jan. 6. — Telecom mogul, Mr Thaksin Shinawatra, is poised to become Thailand's next Prime Minister after cruising to victory in today's general election despite allegations of graft, early exit polls predicted.

Exit polls released by Thai television stations minutes after voting ended said Mr Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party would win around 200 seats in the 500-seat lower house of parliament. Its nearest rival, the Democrat Party of Mr Chuan Lekpai, would win around 100 seats.

"I would like to thank the people of Thailand for giving the mandate to Thai Rak Thai and me to run the country. I will put my heart and soul into working for the country," Mr Thaksin said.

The scale of victory means the 51-year-old billionaire ought to be able to secure prime ministership by forming an alliance with one or two smaller parties. His likely choices for coalition partners are the new



**Mr Thaksin Shinawatra thanks voters at a press conference in Bangkok on Saturday. — AP/PTI**

Aspiration Party of Mr Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and the Chart Thai Party of Mr Banharn Silpa-Archa.

But Mr Thaksin may not last long as Prime Minister, for he is accused by the country's anti-graft watchdog of hiding assets when he was a minister in the 1990s.

Mr Thaksin denies the allegation, but if the charges are upheld by the constitutional court, he will be banned from politics for five years.

That could leave a

constitutional crisis and the prospect of 15 unelected judges removing a Prime Minister from office.

Thailand may then witness lengthy horse-trading before a new Prime Minister emerges, possibly without a clear mandate. Analysts suggest such a crisis could lead to a coup in a country which saw a military takeover less than 10 years ago.

Turnout was brisk today. About 140,000 police were on duty, many protecting polling booths and guarding politicians after a spate of election-related shootings. In an effort to curb high spirits, sale and public consumption of alcohol was banned.

The country's new election commission has powers to disqualify poll cheats and call re-votes. Commission officials say they have seen so much evidence of vote-buying that dozens of candidates could be banned or face a re-vote after the election.

"Re-elections will be held in at least 100 constituencies and it will take at least one month for the lower house to be filled," Mr Chavalit said.

THE STATESMAN

7 JAN 2001

# Thaksin party likely to win race

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, JAN. 5. Thailand goes to the polls tomorrow to elect a 500-member House of Representatives — the first elections to be held since the country promulgated its reformist Constitution in 1997.

The contest is a relatively simple one — between the new Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) party of the telecom tycoon, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, and the Democrats led by Mr. Chuan Leekpai. The complicating factor came after the country's National Counter Corruption Commission



Chuan Leekpai

indicted Mr. Thaksin for hiding or misdeclaring his assets.

Even after the indictment, Mr. Thaksin remains a candidate for Prime Minister. Opinion polls also show that the TRT is likely to emerge as the single largest party though a large chunk of the electorate is said to be undecided. Several smaller parties hold the key to the formation of a new Government. The coalition era, it would appear, is also set to continue in the country — albeit with a new configuration.

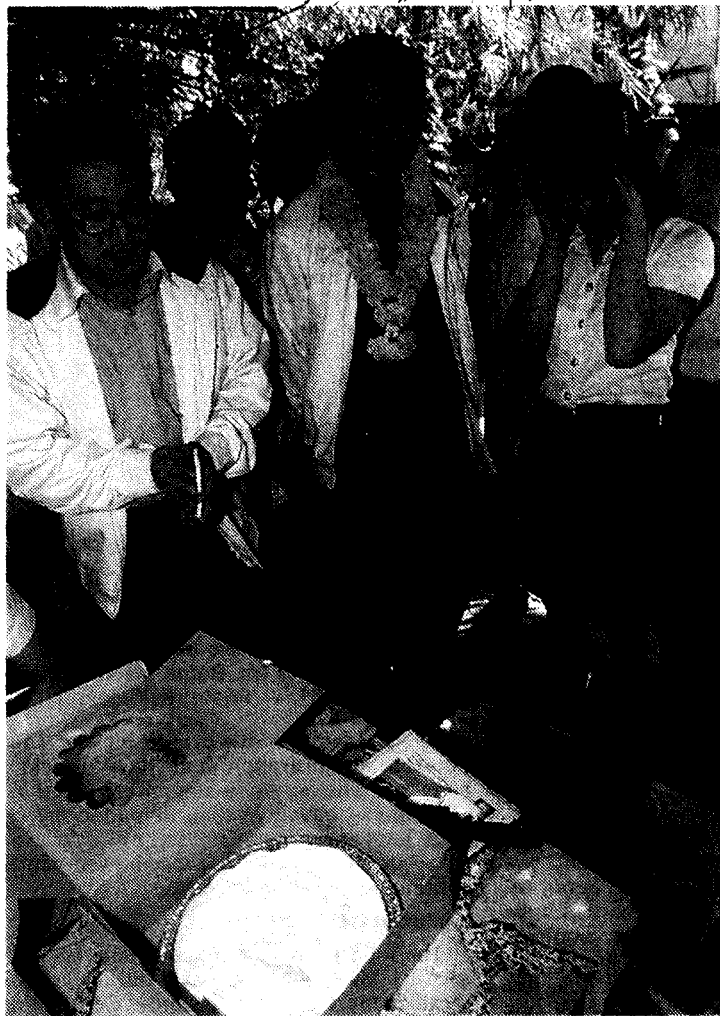
The Prime Minister and his party have conducted a sober, sedate

campaign as opposed to Mr. Thaksin who has promised the moon to the electorate. Prominent among his promises is a one million baht package for every village in the country. He has also pledged to use his considerable business acumen (he heads a multi-billion business conglomerate) to breathe fresh life into a sluggish economy. A total of 80,000 polling booths have been set up across the country while some 150,000 policemen are to provide security for the elections which will see the direct election of 400 M.P.s and another 100 through the new party list system.

The uncertainty since the indictment of Mr. Thaksin will end well after the elections. If convicted by the country's Constitutional Court, Mr. Thaksin will have to resign public office (if he gets it) and stay out of politics for five years. Tomorrow's polling will be just one phase if the Election Commission makes good its promise to disqualify those candidates found to have been involved in vote-buying and fraud. The Election Commissioner, Mr. Sawat Chotepanit, said regardless of tomorrow's result, many popular candidates could have their results invalidated or be expelled from a second ballot.

"The key question is whether the party or individual candidate should be held accountable for the violation," Mr. Sawat told reporters in Bangkok. Apparently, 100 Thai Rak Thai candidates are under investigation by the Election Commission. In an editorial today, *Bangkok Post* said: "The long-awaited election is finally upon us. We go to the polls tomorrow to elect men and women who will represent our interest in Parliament. We will be choosing our representatives under the new rules of the reformist Constitution. It is imperative everything goes smoothly; this election will set the precedent for future polls."

"The Election Commission has all the powers needed to produce an efficient election which can be decided without undue delay. It could, for example, second prose-



The Prime Ministerial candidate of Thailand, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra (centre), joins the birthday celebrations of a student at the Chulalongkorn University, during an election campaign rally in Bangkok on Friday. — AP

cutors and judges to help it clear all fraud cases quickly. Or it could disqualify all suspected cheats to make sure their presence does not delay things. This is the most powerful tool," the *Post* suggested.

"The five (Election) Commissioners must realise they have the support of the whole nation. They must be brave enough to wield the powers granted to them by the Constitution. If they do not dare use the red card, not only will the elections be unavailable

indefinitely but they will be banning a handful of small-time cheats while allowing the majority of vote-buyers an entry into Parliament..." the editorial said.

In its comment, *The Nation* drew up a list of different kinds of "undecided" voters. In its view, those who "disliked" Mr. Chuan Leekpai and "distrusted" Mr. Thaksin could hold the key tomorrow.

"Just follow your heart tomorrow", the paper advised undecided voters.