

## Thai volte face on Suu Kyi

BANGKOK, Oct. 11. — Prime Minister of Thailand Mr Thaksin Shinawatra yesterday defended the military government of Burma's handling of the political deadlock in that country, saying the junta has demonstrated that "concrete" progress has been made.

Mr Thaksin said the Burmese government had provided their Asean partners at last week's summit in Bali, Indonesia, with a seven-point road map to democratisation, as well as "recent" photos of pro-democracy leader Ms Aung San Suu Kyi "smiling and in cheerful mood". The announcement by Mr Thaksin, as well as Asean leaders at the Bali summit, was a major turn around from the July meeting in Phnom Penh when the ten-member regional grouping issued a statement calling on the Burmese junta to "immediately release" Suu Kyi from detention.

He said Rangoon had agreed to provide fellow Asean members with regular updates on the political development of the country, including the work of the constitutional drafting committee. Ms Suu Kyi has been detained since the bloody 30 May clash between members of her Opposition party and junta supporters, which many observers labelled a calculated move by the government.

**Soros slur:** American philanthropist Mr George Soros, the man often blamed for triggering the Asian meltdown is financing the groups that want to undermine Thailand's image during the upcoming Apec meetings, Mr Thaksin Shinawatra said yesterday. Soros has been accused of leading a pack of currency speculators in a series of assaults on the baht from 1995, eventually forcing the central bank to float the currency in July 1997. — **Nation/ ANN**

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## Thai held for possession of nuclear material

**BANGKOK, JUNE 14.** Working closely with U.S. agents, police in Thailand arrested a man who was trying to sell them radioactive material that could be used to make "dirty bombs."

Police did not say if the man was suspected of having terrorist connections, and U.S. officials said the material was not destined for weapons against Americans, as originally suspected.

Thai police met Narong Penanam (44), in the parking lot of a Bangkok hotel on Friday, where he gave them a metal container that he said contained uranium, police Col. Pisit Pisutisak said. Narong — who said he got the material from neighbouring Laos and that his contacts there had more — was expecting to sell it for \$240,000.

An analysis of the material revealed it was not uranium but the industrial material cesium-137, suitable for making dirty bombs, which spread radioactive chemicals over a wide area.

Narong was charged with illegal possession of nuclear materials, punishable by up to a year in prison. The arrest came after three alleged Islamic terrorists were arrested this week in southern Thailand.— AP

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# Riots hit Thai-Cambodia ties

By P. S. Suryanarayana

**BANGKOK, JAN. 30.** Even as the diplomatic equation and the people-to-people ties between Cambodia and Thailand sank to a dramatic low following overnight anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh, the authorities in Bangkok seemed to have prevented the threatening crisis from spinning out of control by evening today.

The day began with a protest outside the Cambodian embassy here, but the law enforcement authorities were understood to have been able to keep the backlash in check in the context of the immensely popular Thai monarch's counsel behind-the-scenes that the citizens of this country should not allow their emotions to dictate the course of events at this fragile moment in neighbourly relations between two members of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

The crisis was sparked yesterday by anti-Thai arson and rioting by a Cambodian mob, estimated to number over 1,000, over the alleged derogatory re-

marks against the Khmer nation by a famous television personality of Thailand. The Thai embassy in Phnom Penh was torched by the mob and several other establishments belonging to Thai businessmen and others were systematically subjected to violent attacks. While no casualties were reported among the Thai nationals in Cambodia, at least one Cambodian rioter was suspected to have died as a result of some mob-control action. There was no authentic confirmation of the toll.

The Thai ambassador to Cambodia, Chatchawed Chartsuwan, and other diplomatic personnel escaped by the skin of their teeth by fleeing from the advancing mob through the rear-exit of the embassy building in Phnom Penh. As the envoy later recounted, on his return to Bangkok today, he and the others scaled to safety and were lucky to have made the escape by a boat that drew up along the river by the side of the embassy premises. The Thai ambassador was recalled in

protest, while several hundred Thai nationals were evacuated from Cambodia.

While the Cambodian envoy in Bangkok had to leave in a diplomatic offensive from the Thai side, the Cambodian leader, Hun Sen, sought to assuage the sense of outrage in Bangkok. The Thailand Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, took note of Mr. Hun Sen's apologies but noted that the arson attacks on the Thai embassy and nationals in Phnom Penh were by far the worst incident in bilateral ties. At one stage during the assault on the Thai mission in Cambodia, the Thaksin administration seemed willing and ready to take extra-territorial steps to rescue the besieged Thai nationals and diplomats. In the event, though, no such action was initiated, and the revered Thai monarch's subtle intervention today lent a sense of direction, diplomatic observers said here. The person in the eye of this diplomatic-cultural storm, the Thai actress, Suwanan Khongying, clarified that she had never made the offending comment that Cambodians had (allegedly) robbed the Thais of the Angkor Vat temple complex which the Khmer people regard as the symbol of their nationhood. In this sense, the Cambodia-Thai row is reminiscent of the anti-India rioting in Nepal a few years ago in the context of rumours that an Indian film star had denigrated the Nepali people. In the Thai-Cambodia context, the latest crisis erupted at a sensitive time within the ASEAN forum, which is seeking to combat terrorism in the region and strike a common denominator as regards the U.S. military moves against Iraq and the diplomatic offensive against North Korea.