

Southeast Asia by Sophie Tanapura

Thailand: another IMF victim?

A shakeup in the Thai cabinet shows that the prime minister is continuing the very policies that led to the recent attempted coup.

Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda has yet to learn the lesson of the aborted coup d'état of Sept. 9. Neither in the ministerial reshuffle he recently effected, nor in his television address before leaving for the United Nations, has Prem given any indication that he understands that what is now needed of him, for his own political survival as well as that of his nation, is economic development.

Thailand needs to launch large-scale infrastructure projects—in energy, water, transportation, etc. These are crucial for the increase of the nation's productivity, and will allow the country to further develop its rich agro-industrial potential.

But instead, under Prem's direction, Finance Minister Sommai Hoontrakul has stopped construction on two power plants, and the Eastern Seaboard Project, the favorite of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), has been de-emphasized into a mere fertilizer plan, instead of broader industrialization.

Putting the question of the unsuccessful coup aside for a moment, Prem has hardly projected an image of stability. He has placed his trust in the group of young advisers educated in various locations in the United States and headed by a certain Dr. Wattanyu Na Thalang, an architect by profession and a dilettante in astrology.

It was this group of advisers, which includes Dr. Virabhongsa Ramangkura, a disciple of the monetarist Wharton School wizard and former Communist Party-U.S.A. member

Lawrence Klein, that predicted that a devaluation-tax package would overcome Thailand's economic woes. Not only are they proven wrong, but it is demonstrated that their crystal-ball gazing is done only in the interests of their string pullers—the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—and not in the interests of the sovereign nation of Thailand.

The Thai prime minister attempted to pass off his economic program on television as something novel. Still working very much along the lines of the IMF, Prem suggested cuts in imports, cancellation or postponement of major projects requiring huge investments, promotion of small-to-medium labor-intensive industries in provincial areas which will rely less on machinery and energy, and, finally, the encouragement of tourism as a premier "growth industry."

Not one of the above proposals recommended by the NESDB and the budget bureau's dull-brained Ph.Ds is innovative, and they will merely continue to steer the country down a course of economic decline and political instability, the consequences of the IMF/World Bank policies which Cuban President Fidel Castro so delights in.

Three new government positions are open, due to the resignation of Industry Minister Ob Vasuratna and his two deputies—because of suspected participation in the Sept. 9 coup attempt by National Democratic Party leader and former Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanan.

Prem, forced to reshuffle the cab-

inet, decided to promote Dr. Chirayu Isarangkul from deputy minister of industry to the level of minister, and brought in Anant Chaisaeng of the Progressive Party and population-control propagandist Mechai Viravaidhya as deputy ministers.

A curious decision for someone like Prem who cares a lot about his "image": What can the image of Thailand be to the world if Prem has chosen to nominate, to an important economic position, a dangerous clown such as vasectomy advocate Mechai, who is proud of his nickname, the "Condom King."

The new area of responsibility allocated to Mechai concerns "industrial development in the rural areas," and can only spell further disaster for the economy. Mechai, an international executive of Prince Philip's World Wildlife Fund and known to enjoy the support of the U.S. embassy, is the most outspoken genocide lobbyist in Thailand.

At a June 5 event in Bangkok sponsored by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, Mechai announced that not only does he condone China's "one-child only," infanticide and forced-abortion policy, but that he has advised the Peking government on its population-reduction policies.

The appointment of Mechai only confirms the path which Prem has decided to follow—that paved by the IMF and World Bank. Authoritative sources say that, following his Sept. 30 address before the U.N. General Assembly, Prem will spend most of his time in meetings with Henry Kissinger—who is also a sponsor of Mechai.

This policy direction, featuring a 17% devaluation of the baht at IMF suggestion, produced the conditions that prompted the attempted coup. Prem, in the wake of that near disaster, has decided on more of the same.