

Sudden Calm in Thailand After All the Bloodshed

Bangkok

Thailand's one-day-old military dictatorship arrested scores of suspected leftists yesterday but otherwise imposed itself so unobtrusively that many of the tourists streaming through Bangkok's temples and markets were unaware a coup had taken place.

A midnight-to-dawn curfew was lifted, and deposed Premier Seni Pra-
moj was released from protective custody. Schools and the city's 30 newspapers remained closed, however.

The arrests, estimated by some sources to total 3000, emphasized that the "reformist" regime of Admiral Sangad Chaloryu intends to end what it called the unruly politics that culminated in Wednesday's savage ultra-rightist-police battle with leftist students.

Troops were cleaning up the evidence of violence at downtown Thammasat University, where about 30 people were killed and hundreds wounded. Tanks guarded the royal palace and military headquarters and army Jeeps with machine guns patrolled Bangkok's streets. But that was about all the visible evidence of the new regime.

What happened at Thammasat University was not clear to the Thais themselves. All newspapers have been banned and the government radio has given a highly colored account of the battle. The government admitted a death toll of 26 — a conservative figure, as photographs of the brutal scene clearly indicated — and then the radio ceased referring to the subject.

The radio was also silent about the number of arrests, which are known to include several hundred students and a large number of militants and real or suspected leftists. Although there was the tone of a witchhunt in initial

government statements, many relatively prominent figures were permitted to leave Bangkok. One of these was the rector of Thammasat University, who had refused to crack down on the student body.

The willingness to let political losers depart has been traditional in the military dictatorships that ruled Thailand from 1932 until 1973, when student riots ousted the previous military regime. The controversial return recently of former dictator Thanom Kittikachorn, who is now in a Bangkok temple as a Buddhist monk, was a major issue in the student protests that preceded the latest coup.

Sangad yesterday was directing affairs from a second story office in military headquarters across from the royal palace.

A jovial man with a reputation as something of a sea dog in a navy little noted for such dutiful attitudes, Sangad was almost nonchalant strolling the corridors and waving "no" at reporters who showed up although their newspapers had been closed.

Sangad's only substantive utterance in one of those quick exchanges was that Thai foreign policy would be unchanged, presumably meaning he would continue efforts to smoothe relationships with Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos despite his unbending domestic anti-Communist policies.

How Thailand's Communist neighbors will ultimately react to the coup in Southeast Asia's most vulnerable "domino" remains a question mark. Both Vietnam and Laos broadcast accounts calling the new government a "dictatorial clique" and condemning the slaughter at Thammasat University.

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