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AIRGRAM

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AIRGRAM BRANCH

FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK DATE: August 2, 1971

SUBJECT: By-Election for Bangkok National Assembly Seat August 20, 1971

REF :

1. SUMMARY: There has been an unexpected degree of interest in the Phranakorn (Bangkok and some suburban areas) by-election scheduled for August 20. Front runner in the campaign appears to be Khunying Lekha Aphaiwongse, the Democratic Party candidate, wife of the late leader of the party, the popular Khuang Aphaiwongse. The Democrats have always been strong in Bangkok, winning every seat in Phranakorn province in 1969. However, a surprising challenge to Democratic hegemony in Bangkok is being made by Dr. Chamnan Yuvapurna, founder and leader of the new Local Progressive Party, former Lord Mayor of Bangkok, and former Director General of the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior. Chamnan's chances are heightened by the fact that the Democrats face a possible split among party members and sympathizers due to former Democrat luminary Kukrit Pramoj's support of the candidacy of bright, young Meechai Viravaidya. Chamnan's bid is based on good party organization, his many friends in the government, and the fact that the government party has nominated a nonenity. Many government party supporters, particularly of the Praphat faction, are expected to vote for him and some may even work on his behalf. Voter turn-out could well be the decisive factor in the election, with a reasonable good turn-out working to the advantage of the Democrats and a poor turn-out tipping the scales toward Chamnan. END SUMMARY.

2. Of the 16 candidates who originally registered for the Bangkok by-election, only two seem to be serious contenders at present. They are former Lord Mayor of Bangkok and DirGen of the Department of Local Administration (DOLA), Dr. Chamnan Yuvapurna, and Khunying Lekha Aphaiwongse, widow of former PM Khuang Aphaiwongse and the official Democratic Party candidate. Lekha now appears to be the front runner, but her victory is far from certain due to a possible split in the

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Democratic vote, losses to other opposition candidates and the fact that Chamnan may receive significant though only tacit support from the government.

3. Early in the campaign Meechai Viravaidya, a bright young civil servant and writer, appeared to be a serious challenger also. Well known intellectual and journalist M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, one of the founders of the Democratic Party, gave his public support to Meechai. Kukrit appeared at Meechai's first rally which, with approximately 20,000 people, outdrew the first big Democratic rally by 25%. Meechai's major hope for election rests on Kukrit's appeal to Democratic Party members and sympathizers. However, Kukrit has failed to give the all out support Meechai expected, and rumors are that for the rest of the campaign he will only give perfunctory support sufficient to keep his commitment. Meechai has also been disappointed in his hope to gain the support of the student and intellectual community whose support has gone instead to another independant, young (38) politician Prapahan Kamolphet, whose campaign features a call for popular election of the Prime Minister.

4. The Democratic Party has been campaigning hard for Lekha. However, the campaign has not been for Lekha so much as for the Democratic Party. Although the Democrats swept the 1969 Bangkok elections, taking all 15 seats with a minimum 35,000 vote lead, the party has been beset by factionalism, popular dissatisfaction for poor performance in running Bangkok municipal affairs, and a serious threat to party unity resulting from Kukrit's support for Meechai. The party has been campaigning with some apparent success on the theme of party unity claiming that a vote for Meechai is in fact a vote for Chamnan. Their appeal not to split the vote may have been influential in causing one minor candidate to withdrew in favor of the Democrats.

5. The major surprise in the campaign has been Chamnan's emergence as a major contender. Although his organizational ability and wealth are well known, his reputation for corruption (a reputation which he is trying hard to convince the voters is false) would have seemed to be a serious handicap in seeking elective office. However, Chamnan and his party seem to have got their campaign off to a fairly successful start in the suburban areas of Bangkok on bread and butter issues, and it is carefully planned to climax with a major rally in the city's famous Phramane grounds two days before the election. Also, his willingness to face publicly charges against him seems to have gained him some ground on that front. But by far Chamnan's greatest asset is the failure of the government party (SPT) to name a serious candidate.

6. The SPT fielded Sunthorn Thawipoke, a nonenity, whose nomination has created considerable dissatisfaction within the party at all levels. As a result, a significant portion of the pro-government vote may well go to Chamnan by default. Further, some SPT leaders, especially

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