

Chamlong's role in '76 coup recounted

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A CANDIDATE of Palang Dharma Party put its leader Chamlong Srimuang in a very awkward situation yesterday when she unexpectedly recounted how she and the Bangkok governor joined the rightwing movement to oppose the students in the chaos that led to the October 6 bloodbath.

Mrs Chongkol Srikanchana, who is running in Bangkok's Constituency 7 (Bangkapi), said she fought "side by side" with Chamlong to try to bring down the M.R. Seni Pramoj Government. Chamlong, who listened to her surprise speech at a rally yesterday in Lumpini Park without showing emotion, could not be reached for immediate comment.

Her recounting of the country's most politically turbulent period apparently upset Chamlong, who was closely identified with the "Young Turks" army officers that supported the coup on October 6,

1976 against the Seni Government. The coup was preceded by an astonishingly violent attack by rightwing militants on the campus of Thammasat University.

Chongkol, who in 1975 helped form the so-called "Housewives For Thailand Group", a movement of rightwing women, had earlier told a weekly magazine that Chamlong was one of the army officers giving directives to the rightwing groups opposing the student activists. The students were protesting the return of former premier Thanom Kittikachorn at Thammasat University.

She said in an interview with *Lak Thai* that Chamlong disguised himself as a rightwing activist "wearing a cap and a pair of sunglasses."

"I did not know where he came from then. He kept handing me microphones and told me what to say at many of the rallies we held. And when we decided to march on Government House, he kept reminding me to say what I should say and passed me the microphone. It was only then that it occurred to me that he was Chamlong," she said in the interview.

She also displayed a copy of the magazine at the rally as she spoke proudly about her actions.

Chongkol has become the first person to speak publicly about Chamlong's role in the events leading to the bloody incident that ended with scores of students dead and wounded in one of the blackest events in modern Thai history.

Chamlong was then a lieutenant colonel. It was a period when students, lifted by the October 14 Uprising that toppled the Thanom Government three years earlier, were playing a dominant role over both the government and the armed forces.

The Young Turks felt they were humiliated by the students and



CHONGKOL

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FROM PAGE ONE

►►► CHONGKOL

decided to support the coup that crushed the student movement and brought down the Seni Government.

It was the first time that Chongkol, who is known to be outspoken, was allowed to address a public rally after

joining Palang Dharma Party.

Her public recounting of her and Chamlong's role in the October events was unexpected and apparently caught the governor off guard.

Rally organizers tried to cut her short. She was offended and said she should be given the same speaking time as the others.

Chongkol also surprised the crowd by reading a poem attacking Premier Prem Tinsulanonda. The poem, entitled "Go Home Pa. You Have Dissolved the House Thrice," criticized Prem for having stayed in power for eight years but failing to improve the people's life.

Chamlong, who is Prem's former aide, has avoided touching Prem, who has been criticized by many others in the campaign. Chamlong's critics,

especially in Prachakorn Thai Party, have accused him of supporting Prem's return to power after the election. Chamlong has denied the charge.

Chongkol stepped down from the stage only after the rally organizers sent a light signal that she had used up her time.

An angry Chongkol was quickly beckoned by Chamlong. She later told reporters that the Palang Dharma leader was unhappy with her account of the

October 6 events. "He told me not to make any more reference to the past because it would affect the party," she said without elaborating.

Chongkol said she felt very uneasy by the way the party was trying to limit her role. "Why do we all have to speak the same thing...about virtues? Why can't we say something that interests the people?" she asked.

She said she was "feeling fed up" with the party.

said they expect even more progress on reforestation if Prem becomes

"The officer has been suspended since May 9 pending investigation for more than

Come on, tell us more

WHEN Chongkol Srikanchana, a Bangkok candidate of Palang Dharma Party, recounted her role in the events leading to the coup on October 6, 1976, she did it with a degree of pride. After all, Chongkol was one of the leading right wing activists who did much to incite the mobs to go against students who were protesting the return of former premier Thanom Kittikachorn.

From the way she spoke, Chongkol certainly hoped her "past achievement" should serve to win her some votes from the constituents.

But her party leader, Chamlong Srimuang, definitely would not buy that idea — especially not when she suggested that he also had a role in that most turbulent period of the country. Chongkol alluded to Chamlong's role twice — the first time in an interview with a weekly magazine, and again during a campaign rally last Friday.

When confronted by reporters yesterday, Chamlong acknowledged his part in those events but denied any role in the bloody attack on students inside Thammasat University and the subsequent coup. He said he did attend rallies of the anti-government right wing groups, knew many of their leaders closely, and supported them because he thought their campaigns against the students, engineered by a certain faction in the army, were aimed at "restoring law and order".

He also explained that he had to wear shabby dress and sunglasses (as recalled by Chongkol) when he attended the rallies because he was then still an army officer and didn't want to be recognized.

(He was then a lieutenant colonel attached to the Army Research and Development Centre and a leader of the Young Turks, and before that had served in the CIA-funded mercenary army fighting against the Pathet Lao communist guerrillas in Laos). He joined the protest march of tens of thousands of right-wingers on Government House to demand government action against the student demonstrators at Thammasat.

By his own account, one of the right wing leaders that he admired then was Chongkol. Chongkol recalled in the magazine interview that Chamlong, under his civilian disguise, used to follow her and her right wing group and prompted her on what to say in the rallies.

Chamlong is well-known for his bravery during his days fighting the communists in Laos. He and his colleagues in the Young Turks organized an exhibition of arms seized from Thai communists to highlight the communist threat while the demonstration at Thammasat was in full swing. But his ties to other right wing groups at that time are not clear.

Chamlong has, unfortunately, cautioned Chongkol against talking about his past because he thinks it is no longer relevant to the current general election.

But we feel that Chamlong shouldn't be afraid of anyone, least of all a member of his party, talking about his past or admiring some of his "achievements". Even though he is not running in the election, he should, in his capacity as party leader, be able to handle any kind of public scrutiny of his past.

LOCAL NEWS

PDP GAGS ITS OUTSPOKEN LADY

CHONGKOL'S FIRST AND LAST RALLY



CHONGKOL'S DAMAGING STATEMENT:

Chamlong (PDP leader) disguised himself as a civilian to stage-manage many of the right-wing rallies (prior to the Oct 6, 1976 coup).

CHONGKOL Srikanchana's outspokenness has suddenly turned into a liability for the Palang Dharma Party. And the party has decided to make her pay the price.

The party on Sunday decided to make her appearance on Friday at a Lumpini Park public rally her last.

The 59-year-old housewife and mother of four embarrassed the party, especially its leader, Bangkok Governor Chamlong Srimuang, with a recount of her role in the events leading to the Oct 6, 1976 coup. She even linked Chamlong to those events during the Lumpini Park rally and in an interview with a weekly magazine.

Chongkol, who is still running in Bangkok's Constituency 7 (Bangkapi) for Palang Dharma Party, also spoke out against Premier Prem Tinsulanonda in a poem she read at the rally. Chamlong and his party members have been careful not to question Prem, who has been made into a campaign issue by many other political parties.

But who is this woman that has given the first sign of dissidence in the party?

Chongkol is no stranger to politics. She was known as an outspoken and eloquent orator who drew crowds in her heyday. She was one of the speakers who whipped up the emotions of right-wing activists at anti-government and anti-student rallies preceding the October coup.

In her interview with *Lak Thai* weekly magazine, she recalled that her attitude toward students swung from one extreme to the other. She said she was mad when she heard on the radio that students were being killed on the streets during the Oct 14, 1973, uprising that brought down the Thanom Government.

"I really felt sympathetic with the students who were up in arms against the tyrants," she said.

But her sympathy for the students was transformed into hatred after learning that they were infiltrated by communists, she said.

That was when Chongkol earnestly joined the right-wing movement in opposing both the students and the government of M.R. Seni Pramot. She recalled that she addressed many anti-government rallies and even spoke on the army-run Yarnkroh radio station.

"The country was in crisis," she said. "Everybody was afraid of the domino theory. We were afraid Thailand would become another Vietnam, Laos or Kampuchea."

At the peak of the turbulence, Chongkol, who helped form a right-wing housewife group, said she was made the chief of a delegation of right-wing activists

to see then-premier Seni at Government House to demand decisive action to end the political chaos. (At the time, thousands of students were holding a mass rally at Sanam Luang to oppose the return from exile of former strongman Thanom Kittikachorn).

"But the premier [Seni] treated us like we were children. He told us to go home," she said.

By her own account, Chongkol's most crucial role was when she led the right-wing protesters in a march from Royal Plaza to Government House on the afternoon of Oct 6. She said she and the protesters stormed into Government House unopposed.

"The premier and many of the Cabinet members were there. We told them to put an end to the chaos or resign. They promised to take action," she said.

But Seni never had a chance to move. The armed forces staged a military coup that evening.

During the Lumpini Park rally, Chongkol spoke proudly about her role. She even said that Chamlong, who was then a lieutenant colonel, disguised himself as a civilian to stage-manage many of the right-wing rallies. She said Chamlong told the speakers what to say at the rallies.

(Chamlong last week said he only joined the anti-government marches and had nothing to do with the coup).

Chongkol suggested that she knew many of the "Young Turk" army officers, including Chamlong, very well. "Even Chamlong refers to me as Pi Bua," she said, referring to her nickname.

In the interview with *Lak Thai*, Chongkol claimed that she was approached by Samak Sundaravej, leader of Prachakorn Thai Party, to run in a general election for his party. "We know each other as friends and relatives," she said of her relations with Samak, who has made no secret about his dislike for the Palang Dharma Party.

One of the reasons why Chongkol, a former village scout leader, decided to be a candidate for Palang Dharma goes back to the period before the October 6 coup, she said. Chamlong was closely identified with the Young Turks that supported the coup.

Though she said she supported Chamlong in his quest for the Bangkok governorship in 1985, she unsuccessfully ran in the city assembly election for another political group.

Chongkol, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in commerce and accounting from Chulalongkorn University, said she is confident about her chances in the July 24 election though it is her debut in national politics. She said she has a strong desire to help society.

Students want Chamlong to explain Oct role

STUDENT leaders yesterday asked Palang Dharma Party's leader, Chamlong Srimuang, to clarify his alleged involvement in the bloody attack on students at Thammasat University that preceded the October 1976 coup.

A group of students, led by vice president Paramet Phutth of the Ramkhamhaeng University Student Union, submitted a letter to a party official at the party headquarters on Ratchadapisek Road.

"Our request for Maj Gen Chamlong to clear himself on his political role in 1976 is not aimed at discrediting any one," Paramet said.

"But who played what roles in the mass killing of innocent students must be recorded in history. We cannot afford to just

forget the incident," the student leader said.

The students vowed to persistently pursue the case if the Bangkok governor failed to convince the public about his political past.

Last Friday, Palang Dharma candidate Chongkol Srikanchana said during a campaign rally at Lumpini Park that Chamlong played an instrumental role in stage-managing anti-government and anti-student rallies during one of Thailand's most politically turbulent periods.

Chamlong, on Saturday, denied any involvement in the right-wing mob's raid on the students.

The soldier-turned-politician, who was closely associated with "Young Turk" army officers that supported the coup, also denied any role in the coup that brought down the Seni Administration on Oct 6, 1976.

Chamlong said he only joined anti-government demonstrations out of concern about the "lawless state" of the city.

Curfew lifted in Rangoon

RANGOON — Burmese authorities yesterday lifted an overnight curfew imposed on the capital Rangoon on June 21 following days of bloody rioting.

The Rangoon People's Council said its order lifting the 8 pm to 4 am curfew took effect from yesterday. The curfew had initially been set to

Post Impressionist
Harrison Morisot George

Politics as usual

AND what did you do in the coup, Daddy?

I thought we had a new type of political party. But have we all been fooled by a crew-cut charisma and cleaner streets?

Mrs Chongkol Srikanjana, Phalang Dharma candidate for Bangkok constituency, is no longer able to answer any questions on the matter, since the party of morals and virtue has cut off her microphone. But I'll ask them anyway.

In an interview with *Lak Thai* magazine and later in a curtailed campaign speech at Sanam Luang, Mrs Chongkol dragged out of the closet the skeleton of an episode in Thai politics that most people have been busily trying to forget.

In the period before the tragic (and unpunished) events of October 6, 1976, Mrs Chongkol was a leading figure among the cluster of right-wing pressure groups that eventually toppled a democratically-elected government. She was promptly appointed a non-elected senator by the non-elected government that took over and, to give the woman her due, she seems not one jot embarrassed by the memory.

Not so her party leader in whom she professes so much faith. Maj-Gen Chamlong Srimuang, Governor of Bangkok who heads the Phalang Dharma Party in his spare time, not only appears to be perturbed by Mrs Chongkol's resurrection of the October 6 affair, he wasn't too keen on anyone knowing what he was up to at the time. It appears that during Mrs Chongkol's agitations 12 years ago, then Lieutenant-Colonel Chamlong was at her elbow wearing a cap and dark glasses. He now says that he didn't want to be recognised because he was an army officer.

QUESTION

Well, no, I suppose he wouldn't. Which leads to the first question.

The military and police have made a big song and dance of protesting their neutrality in the forthcoming polls. Orders have been flashed out to that effect. (It's a strange thing but the military and police of this country seem unable merely to send an order — they're forever being "flashed out.") Governor Chamlong has also made a point of doing his campaigning outside of his official hours as Governor.

So what of his neutrality back then when he was prompting people at the microphone? And did he scrupulously don his disguise only after his working day was done?

And what's with the disguise anyway? Governor Chamlong now says it was because in those confused times, nobody knew who anyone was. Well if they all followed his example

and walked round in shades and sun-hats, I'm not surprised. It's perhaps a pity that former Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn, whose return sparked the tragedy, didn't adopt the same policy when he arrived at Don Muang.

Mrs Chongkol says that at the time she was concerned about the breakdown of law and order, a view that Governor Chamlong has repeated. Yes, indeed, those were wild times. I remember that during that period I once had a bomb thrown at me, I was once forced out of my office by an armed attack and that eventually my office was ransacked. But since the perpetrators were vocational students, the Krathing Daeng and other right-wing organisations, I have an unfortunate bias towards thinking that it was the people on the same side as Mrs Chongkol who were guilty of most of the violence.

OVERTHROW

Mrs Chongkol is also happy to admit that one of her aims at the time was the overthrow of a democratically-elected government. I have not read that Governor Chamlong has said as much, but it is difficult to think that he could believe his actions at the time would strengthen the government in any way. Mrs Chongkol and Governor Chamlong both then became senators in the unelected government that followed, so one is led to another troubling question. Just how much faith do they have in democracy?

Before candidates were registered, Phalang Dharma publicised the fact that they were screening their candidates very carefully. It appears that Mrs Chongkol did not in fact even apply to be a candidate, but was personally invited to stand by Governor Chamlong. Just exactly what kind of screening did they do? A party that finds itself having to muzzle one of its most prominent candidates must have something wrong in its selection procedures.

And finally, there is Phalang Dharma's reaction to Mrs Chongkol's forthright remarks. If a party is ready to gag one of its own members for telling a few embarrassing home truths, what could we expect its attitude to be towards dissenting opinions if ever it came to power?

Governor Chamlong's election in 1985, in its campaign style, its financing, and in its result, seemed to herald a brave new era in the often seedy Thai political scene. The traditional image of shifty, self-serving politicians was, we thought, swept away by the virtuous simplicity of a *mor hom* shirt.

Behind the broad smile, are we now seeing the unacceptable face of politics as usual?

Academic comes to Chamlong's defence

A LEADING academic yesterday defended Palang Dharma Party leader Chamlong Srimuang against allegations concerning the Oct 6, 1976 bloodbath, stating that Chamlong's alleged involvement is a "distortion" of history.

Prof Chai-anan Samudvanija of Chulalongkorn University's political science faculty said, "My studies on history show that Chamlong had nothing to do with the event."

Chamlong has denied that he stage-managed anti-government and anti-student rallies prior to right-wing mobs attacking the Thammasat University students, at the time politically powerful.

Dr Chai-anan said the allegation that Chamlong was among those who incited mobs that killed hundreds of students at Thammasat University in 1976 is "unfair and aimed at destroying a good person."

He also said the Bangkok governor was then among the advocates of a 1977 bill seeking amnesty for students who fled into the jungle after the turbulence.

"Chamlong is a healer, not a political criminal. Many people owe him," he said.

Chamlong yesterday rejected students' invitation for him to visit Thammasat University and clarify his role in events leading to the Oct 6 tragedy.

The Bangkok governor said he is scheduled to go to the South this Saturday when the discussion, entitled "Oct 6 and its impacts on democracy and the Thai society",

will take place.

Chamlong said he is "ready" to make the clarification when Palang Dharma holds its last major poll rally at Sanam Luang, near the university, on July 18.

"I'm sorry I cannot go (to the university). I don't want to avoid the students, but my trip (to the South) cannot be cancelled," he said.

Palang Dharma's main rival, Prachakorn Thai Party, had been silent over the issue until yesterday, when its leader, Samak Sundaravej, swore that he had no role in the bloodbath.

"May Prachakorn Thai be damned if I was really involved in the incident," he was quoted by his *Daily Mirror* newspaper as saying.

As expected, he dropped a curse on his accusers. "If I was not involved, may they be doomed to ruin." Samak said he was just an MP when the violence took place and "had no role or link with any movement."

He indirectly accused Chamlong of trying to re-direct the people's attention.

The vegetarian governor has never mentioned Samak while talking with the press about the issue.

Samak also denied a press report that he had tried to avoid reporters wanting to ask him about the 1976 massacre. "I have never heard anyone asking about Oct 6. I will certainly answer if asked because it's very easy to answer," he said.

Academic: Chamlong not involved in Oct 6 riots



CHAI-ANAN...forgive but don't forget.

A UNIVERSITY lecturer yesterday said Palang Dharma Party leader Chamlong Srimuang had no involvement in the October 6, 1976 bloodbath at Thammasat University, in which scores of students were killed.

Prof Chai-anan Samutvanich, a lecturer of Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Political Science and member of the Royal Institute, said he had no personal ties to Maj-Gen Chamlong and did not belong to any political party, but chose to defend the Bangkok governor out of a sense of "not wanting history to be distorted".

He said it was unfair to implicate someone in an incident without a "true understanding" of the facts.

Prof Chai-anan was referring to attacks against Maj-Gen Chamlong by other political parties after a PDP candidate, Mrs Chongkol Srikanchana, said at a rally that she and Maj-Gen Chamlong were involved in a move-

ment that led to the October 6 riots.

He said he has followed reports in newspapers and felt Maj-Gen Chamlong "must be given justice".

"Since I have thoroughly studied political developments during the October 14, 1973 uprising and the October 6, 1976 incident, I can tell you that a large number of people were involved. And I can assure you that Maj-Gen Chamlong had no involvement in the incident at Thammasat University. Don't ask me who was involved," Prof Chai-anan said.

"But, I want to tell you a story which is known by quite a few people. Remember the law issued by former Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanan to amnesty students, intellectuals and others who were involved in the October 6 incident, and some fled to join communist insurgents in the jungle? I want to make it known that it was Maj-Gen Chamlong and Col Manoon Roopka-

chorn who pushed for the issuing of the amnesty law.

"Without their efforts, the amnesty law might not have been issued at all," the professor said.

He said Maj-Gen Chamlong had tried to heal rifts in the country and did not commit any criminal action during the October 6 incident.

Maj-Gen Chamlong and Col Manoon, who is now in exile in West Germany following the failed coup on September 9, 1985, were prominent figures among Army officers called "Young Turks".

Prof Chai-anan said Maj-Gen Chamlong, who was then a colonel, and Col Manoon were among the few persons who had access to Gen Kriangsak and pushed for the amnesty decree. This happened in late 1977, he said.

"This is Maj-Gen Chamlong's record in history. Children of younger generations who were six or seven years old

when the tragic incident took place should ask their teachers who were behind it. Maj-Gen Chamlong was definitely not involved," he said.

Commenting on student calls for Maj-Gen Chamlong to clarify his role in the event, Prof Chai-anan said "it is a good thing the incident is not forgotten".

"But this historical event should not be used for smear campaigns. It's not fair for Khun Chamlong," he said.

Prof Chai-anan said there were two groups of people in the October 6 incident. One group was dissatisfied with the Seni Pramoj Government and rallied at Government House, and the other formed a movement to crush the students.

Maj-Gen Chamlong was not in either group, the professor said.

"The incident took place 12 years ago. As Buddhists, I think we should forgive whoever was involved in it but should never forget it," he said.



CHAMLONG...pushed for amnesty law.

Prachak: Chamlong linked to Oct 6 riots

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FORMER Army Col Prachak Sawangchit, one of the Young Turks, yesterday accused Bangkok Governor Chamlong Srimuang of having been connected with the October 6 incident in 1976.

Meanwhile, Prachakorn Thai Party leader Samak Sundaravej denied that he, personally, had any involvement in the bloodbath.

Col Prachak made his allegation at a press conference at his export company office in Bang Rak.

He said Maj-Gen Chamlong worked as an intelligence officer at that time and had supplied information on student activities to the Young Turks.

But Col Prachak said Maj-Gen Chamlong was not directly connected with the riots. He said Maj-Gen Chamlong had only gathered information.

Col Prachak's allegations came a day after political science lecturer Chai-anan Samutvanich said the governor was not involved in the events.

Col Prachak also said that after the riots, most of Chulachomklao Military Academy's Class 7 were promoted to higher ranks, as well as appointed to the National Legislative Council.



PRACHAK...upset.

Col Prachak did not elaborate on why Maj-Gen Chamlong allegedly had to supply news to the Young Turks when in fact he worked for Government House.

Sources said Col Prachak was criticising Maj-Gen Chamlong because he was upset that the governor had rejected his application to join the Palang Dharma Party.

Col Prachak was also said to be angry over Maj-Gen Chamlong's rejection of a request to alter voter constituencies in Bang Khen.

Mr Samak made his announcement after a students' group raised questions about his activities during the uprising.

"I was an ordinary MP then," Mr Samak said. "I



SAMAK...I had no gun.

had no gun or any weapon, nor was I in a position to order the shooting of the students.

Mr Samak said the incident took place a long time ago and no academic or historian had asked him about his role.

"But some of those people taught their students in universities that Mr Samak was involved in the case," he said.

Chulalongkorn University student leaders announced yesterday that they would invite some 20 public figures alleged to have been involved in the October 6 incident to clarify their positions on the matter.

Anusorn Tamchai, president of the Student Government of Chulalongkorn University, said

among those to be invited were Mr Samak, Palang Dharma Party leader Maj-Gen Chamlong and former Prime Minister Gen Kriangsak Chomanan.

The students plan to lay wreaths outside the residences of those invited if they refuse to appear tomorrow.

Mr Samak said he would not go to the students, "but I would welcome any of them to come and have a talk with me here if they want to know anything".

He expressed scepticism that "certain people" were trying to link him with the incident after "a leader of a political party" was connected with the unrest.

Mr Samak did not mention any names, but it was clear he was referring to Maj-Gen Chamlong, who has also denied any involvement in the uprising.

The PDP leader was previously asked by Thammasat University students to explain his connection with the October 6 incident, but the Bangkok governor said he could not see the students because he would be tied up with campaigning in the South.

Phirapong Thanompongpan and Manoon Pudth-

"in order to be acquainted with them".

Chamlong didn't push for pardon, Prachak alleges

Editorial, analysis:

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PALANG Dharma Party leader Maj-Gen Chamlong Srimuang had no part in pushing for an amnesty for students and others involved in the October 6, 1976 incident, former Army Col Prachak Sawangchit said yesterday.

His remark contradicted views expressed by Prof Chai-anan Samutvanich, a Chulalongkorn University political science lecturer, who came out in defence of Maj-Gen Chamlong on Tuesday.

Dr Chai-anan said the Bangkok governor not only had no involvement in the tragic incident, but also played an important role in pushing former prime minister Kriangsak Chomanan to issue the amnesty law.

Col Prachak said Dr Chai-anan's statement was incorrect because "the idea of issuing the law was created by Gen Kriangsak himself".

Both Col Prachak and Maj-Gen Chamlong were from Class 7 of the Chulachomklao Military Academy and were part of the so-called "Young Turk" army officers.

"Gen Kriangsak, who at that time was prime minister, consulted us (Young Turks) who were commanders of combat units in order to issue the amnesty law.

"He (Gen Kriangsak) said the students who fled into the jungle after the October 6 incident were not communists, but were persons who wanted to see righteousness and take part in solving the

country's problems."

Col Prachak, who is a former Chart Thai MP for Bangkok, said most of the Young Turks agreed with the idea of the amnesty law.

Col Prachak said it was the Young Turks who had asked Gen Kriangsak to resign as prime minister after discussing the matter at a meeting in which Maj-Gen Chamlong participated.

He described the situation at that time as "chaotic" and said there was then a need for a change of prime minister.

"I voted for him to stay on, but the majority wanted him out. We told him our decision, he said he was ready to resign. The next day he announced his resignation in Parliament," Col Prachak said.

Asked who should be picked to be prime minister after the general election, he said: "We should support the leader of a political party with the highest votes.

"Those who do not run in the election should not be taken into consideration. If a non-elected person is picked for the premiership again, the situation would be the same as before."

He added: "If (Gen Prem Tinsulanonda) was asked to return and turned down the request, I would join others in campaigning throughout the country to build a monument for him."