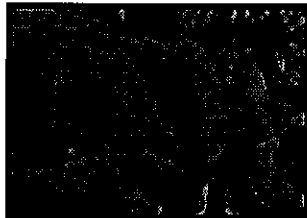
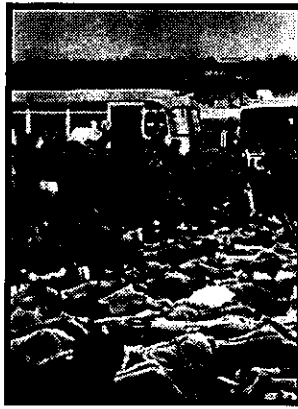


20th Oct 6 Remembrance Photo Gallery

In remembering the Oct 6, 1976 uprising, **The Nation** here presents an electronic photo gallery of the events on that tragic day at Thammasat University compounds.

The news articles are edited versions of the original articles that The Nation reporters and photographers had covered and reprinted in our 20th anniversary special issue in 1991.





*Courtesy: The
Coordinating Committee
of the 20th Anniversary
of October 6th*

Rightist mobs storm Thammasat

Hailed as the saviour of the nation three years earlier, the student movement was brutally crashed in one of the bloodiest political episodes in modern Thai history.

The site of the massacre was the campus of Thammasat University - the very place that gave birth to the spirit of democracy that eventually brought down the Thanom-Prapass dictatorship in 1973.

The victims were the students who were innocent enough to believe that they had brought the country to the dawn of democracy. They paid dearly for idealism with their lives and hopes.

The more than 3,000 students who rallied on the Thammasat campus from Oct 5 through the morning of Oct 6 had no inkling of what was coming - not even when thousands of rightwing activists began gathering near the university. The students were protesting the return of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn who slipped into the country in September and entered the monkhood at Wat Bavornnives.

The rightwing mobs claimed they were angered by the students' mock hanging for an activist who happened to resemble HRH Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn. For days, the military radio network fanned anti-student sentiment with news and commentaries, accusing the students of working for the communists.

The rightwing mobs, mostly village scouts, and members of the Nawapol and Red Gaur groups, led the attack on the campus. Police claimed scattered shots were fired from university buildings at the mobs and that two policemen were wounded.

The massacre began shortly before mid-morning when hundreds of soldiers and policemen opened fire on the campus with assault rifles, grenade launchers and recoilless rifles. Police sharpshooters were seen snipping at the helpless students from buildings nearby. Several terrified students fled the campus, only to be attacked by the angry mobs outside.

The shooting and the lynching went on for almost two hours. An official body count put the death toll at

41. Almost 3,000 students were rounded up and sent to various detention centres. But only 18 of them, mostly leading members of the National Students Centre of Thailand, were charged. They were accused of treason, communist activities, less majeste and attempted murder nut were pardoned a year later by the Kriangsak government.

The same evening, the so-called National Administrative Reform Council, led by Adm Sa-ngad Chalawyoo, toppled the Seni government in a coup and later set up a right-wing government led by Prime Minister Thanin Kraivixien.

As the authorities engaged in a witch hunt for suspected communists, thousands of students and intellectuals began an exodus into the jungles to join the Communist Party of Thailand.

The Thanin Government effectively led Thailand into a "political dark age" during its one year in power before it was toppled by another coup in October, 1977. All political freedom was curtailed. The press was heavily censored and several newspapers were closed down. Relation with Thailand's communists neighbours deteriorated as the administration carried out an intense anti-communist campaign.

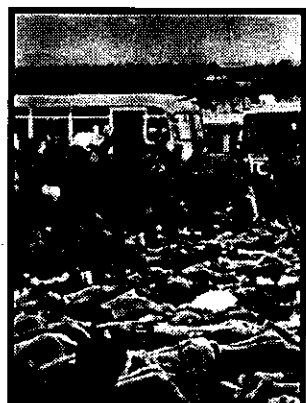
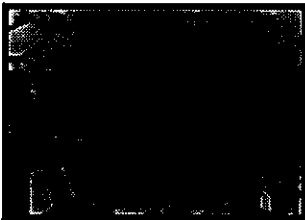
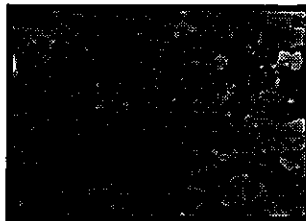
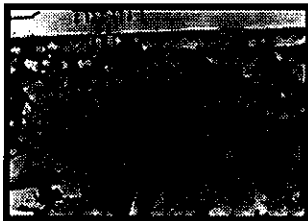
In an effort to prevent a recurrence of student activism, the government introduced a new course on nationalism and patriotism as part of the university curriculum.

But the Thanin Government never came close to stamping out political dissent. The harder cracked down, the more it alienated the people. The government adopted a master plan that Thanin claimed would return democracy in 12 years. But the Thanin regime barely survived one year before was pushed out of power by the same military group that had installed it.

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THE NATION

Local/Regional

Friday, October 4, 1996

Never forget Oct 6, 1976, says Aquino

CORAZON Aquino, former Philippine president, yesterday urged Thais to remember the Oct 6 student massacre "to ensure that it never happens again". [Full Story](#)

Lawsuit charges firms and Slorc with abuse

JAMES FAHN

A CLASS action lawsuit accusing Total, Unocal and Burma's ruling military junta of "egregious human rights violations" was filed yesterday morning in the US federal district court in Los Angeles. [Full Story](#)

Dissolution ends hopes for rights watchdog

YINDEE LERTCHAROENCHOK

THE sudden dissolution of Parliament last month has automatically killed the long-awaited birth of a national commission that would oversee the human rights situation in the country. [Full Story](#)

Eyewitnesses remember bloodbath

DEALING with painful events from one's past is never easy, as was seen on Wednesday night when key eyewitnesses to the killings at Thammasat University on Oct 6, 1976, gave their accounts of what actually happened. [Full Story](#)

Sudarat faults 'recruitment'

PALANG Dharma secretary-general Sudarat Keyuraphan yesterday accused the Democrat and New Aspiration parties of recruiting politicians without considering their qualifications. [Full Story](#)

Opposition sets out to thwart Chavalit's plans

SOMROUTAI RAWANG

THE five opposition parties announced their alliance yesterday, in an apparent bid to block New Aspiration Party (NAP) leader Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's most promising shot yet at the premiership. [Full Story](#)

Chat Thai down but surely not out

SORRAYUTH SUTHASSANACHINDA

WHILE the Nov 17 election is expected to be a "clash of the titans" - the Democrat and New Aspiration Parties - medium-sized parties will play king-makers. And the bruised Chat Thai Party cannot be overlooked. [Full Story](#)

Charge to be re-filed

THE widow of Sangchai Sunthornvut has vowed to re-file a charge of conspiracy to murder against an important suspect, which was dropped in July. [Full Story](#)

Never forget Oct 6, 1976, says Aquino

CORAZON Aquino, former Philippine president, yesterday urged Thais to remember the Oct 6 student massacre "to ensure that it never happens again".

"The military coup which led to the massacre of students on Oct 6, 1976, marked the end of a three-year experiment with democracy here in Thailand," Aquino said.

"We must commemorate this day and etch its significance in our memories, in order not to forget its infamy and to thereby ensure it never happens again," she told attendants of the 5th Annual Academic Conference between the Mahidol and Thammasat universities.

Although the democratic movement only lasted from 1973 to 1976, it put Thailand on the path to democracy, she said.

On Oct 6, 1976, police and a military-sponsored right-wing mob attacked some 4,000 students gathered at the Thammasat University who were protesting against the return of Thailand's former dictator Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, ousted in 1973 by a student-led revolution.

"Your democracy was hard-won then seemingly easily lost, but its effects linger in the consciousness of

the Thai people, so that today the quest for democracy continues," Aquino said. "It is no longer armed and violent, but the longing for its fullness in your lives is just as intense."

The former president said that the parallel experiences of Thailand and the Philippines with oppressive regimes helped instil a sense of the value of human rights and democracy in the minds of the peoples of these two countries.

"For the Filipinos who danced in the streets when the dictator [Ferdinand Marcos] finally departed, freedom from martial rule was indeed sweet," she commented.

Aquino said her first administrative act was to create a presidential committee on human rights, which was assigned to investigate injustices committed by soldiers and policemen during the Marcos regime. She added that she also promoted training of all sectors of society in human rights awareness.

However, she pointed out that the road to democracy in the Philippines was made even more difficult by the seven coup attempts mounted against her by the military whose "powers and privileges were curtailed by the new dispensation and by their leaders who wanted to grab power". [Back to the Top](#)

Lawsuit charges firms and Slorc with abuse

JAMES FAHN

A CLASS action lawsuit accusing Total, Unocal and Burma's ruling military junta of "egregious human rights violations" was filed yesterday morning in the US federal district court in Los Angeles.

The plaintiffs include 15 anonymous Burmese nationals who claim that they have suffered direct harm - including forced labour and portering, assault, rape and the death of family members - as a result of the Yadana gas pipeline being built by the defendants, according to Katharine Redford, director of EarthRights International (ERI), a Kanchanaburi-based non-governmental organisation.

"For the plaintiffs in this case, who cannot voice opposition to such harms in Burma, this lawsuit is their only chance for justice," explained Ka Saw Wa, ERI's field coordinator.

The identities of the Burmese plaintiffs and their location will remain confidential for their own safety, Redford said.

The lawsuit also names as defendants two Unocal executives: John Imle, current president of the US-based company, and Roger Beach, she said.

Comments from the defendants were unavailable at press time because the suit was not publicly announced until 12.30 this morning, Bangkok time.

Earlier this month, however, following the announcement of a different lawsuit to be filed solely against Unocal by the in-exile National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) and the Federation of Trade Unions of Burma (FTUB), Unocal denied allegations of human rights abuses on the Bt30 billion pipeline project.

Eyewitnesses remember bloodbath

DEALING with painful events from one's past is never easy, as was seen on Wednesday night when key eyewitnesses to the killings at Thammasat University on Oct 6, 1976, gave their accounts of what actually happened.

On that bloody day, military and police officers, as well as a military-backed right-wing mob, stormed the university, lynching, torching, and hanging students who had gathered on the campus to demand from their government a just and fair society.

Unable to hold back his tears, Dr Thongchai Winitchakul shared with an audience at The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, his recollections of events when unforgettable crimes were committed by the state against its own people.

Journalists, businessmen and a number of foreign diplomats listened in silence as they watched footage of the killings, while Thongchai attempted to explain how the unthinkable unfolded.

The footage was more disturbing than many in attendance had expected. It revealed unarmed students being fired upon by policemen and dragged across the campus by military personnel.

At Sanam Luang, it showed members of the right-wing mob attacking students and throwing their unconscious bodies into a pile which was then set on fire.

"We owe it to the heroic victims, as well as their families and loved ones, to educate today's people about what really happened on that day." This was the common message the speakers had for their audience. They did not call for revenge, while justice from the state, they said, was another matter entirely. Instead, they simply wished to reveal the truth.

"We must re-humanise the victims and recognise the pain and suffering of their families," said Thongchai, who was imprisoned for two years after Oct 6 and is now a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin in the United States.

"For 20 years, discourse on the event has been limited, evasive, and suppressed. We must have the courage to tell the victims' parents."

It was a dream of a better society that brought together more than 4,000 people to the university campus on that day, he said. And it was that dream that brought a violent end to many of their innocent lives. Ironically, they became the victims of killings done in the name of the monarchy, the nation, and Buddhism - the three elements that are supposed to sustain this country's livelihood.

Thongchai's often emotional recollections moved a number of people in the audience. For a Buddhist country that prides itself on reconciliation, statehood and compassion, it will be interesting to see how it reacts if and when the real story of Oct 6, 1976, is ever told, he said.

Veteran cameraman, Derek Williams, who filmed the tragic event for the CBS network, said he was shocked by the brutality of the right-wing group against the students, which he described as "planned humiliation of young people". He believed that the Oct 6 bloodbath was far worse than events in

Tiananmen Square, which he also covered. [Back to the Top](#)

Sudarat faults 'recruitment'

PALANG Dharma secretary-general Sudarat Keyuraphan yesterday accused the Democrat and New Aspiration parties of recruiting politicians without considering their qualifications.

"It is evident the two major camps are recruiting MPs without exercising foresight and hindsight just to improve their chances of coming to power," Sudarat said.

She said the two camps are recruiting candidates without considering whether they share the same ideology.

The Bangkok MP said the electorate will decide whether these politicians should be re-elected. Sudarat denied that PDP MPs Thawil Praisont, Sansanee Nakpong, and Orathai Kanchanachusak were planning to switch allegiance to the Democrat Party.

She said her Bangkok-based party is pinning its hopes on becoming a national party, with members also having a foothold in the provinces, on the enactment of the political reform legislation.

Meanwhile, PDP deputy secretary-general Pirapong Sakarik said yesterday he is not worried that the PDP is to vie for House seats in Bangkok against former party members such as Kruwan Samana, who will contest on the Democrat ticket. [Back to the Top](#)

Opposition sets out to thwart Chavalit's plans

SOMROUTAI RAWANG

THE five opposition parties announced their alliance yesterday, in an apparent bid to block New Aspiration Party (NAP) leader Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's most promising shot yet at the premiership.

After a cordial meeting filled with laughter and the clinking of wine glasses, opposition leaders exuded confidence that the alliance will triumph at the Nov 17 elections and manage to form a government.

Only the Palang Dharma Party (PDP) expressed reservations about turning the election into a battle between the two blocs, but it did not rule out joining the Democrat-led partnership after the election.

No pact was signed at the Siam City Hotel meeting, with the opposition leaders acknowledging that a "heart-to-heart" agreement was more convenient under the present circumstances. They admitted, though, that unexpected events could unravel the alliance when the new government is formed.

As of now, the Democrat, Chat Pattana, Seritham, Solidarity, and Palang Dharma parties have agreed to "friendly" contests in areas where their strongholds overlap.

With the poll prospects of the Seritham, Solidarity and Palang Dharma parties being not so bright, the

THE NATION

Focus

Saturday, October 5, 1996

Standing on the Outside

When violence erupted at Thammasat University 20 years ago tomorrow, Thai people outside the country could do little but look on in horror. Jittin Ritthirat, Paisarn Lilasrichai and Pravit Rojanaphruk talked to three prominent Thais who, for better or worse, were stranded abroad when the nightmare began. (More stories on Page C3.)

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[Full story](#)

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Twenty years after the fact, school history books are glaringly deficient in dealing with the events that took place at Thammasat University, write Paisarn Lilasrichai and Seneepong Prombunpong.

The events of yesteryear provide us with lessons for the present and the future. That is why history is such an integral part of school curricula. But it seems that every country, like every person, has one or two skeletons in the closet; events in the past it would prefer to forget; unwelcome memories it sometimes goes to great lengths to suppress. But if we distort the records of our collective past as a nation, how can we expect the next generation to learn from the mistakes of their forbears?

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"I didn't pay much attention at first. I had seen many coups before," recalled Sulak who, at that time, was not only Thailand's best-known social critic, but also the owner of one of the country's largest distributors of liberal and socialist books. "It was only when I saw photos in the English papers of people being hanged that I became alarmed. I called the BBC Thai service office [in London] and was told that the coup was very bloody. I didn't think that the consequences would touch me until I received a telegram from my wife advising me not to return home." And so Sulak entered into what he now describes as the most uncertain time in his life.

The telegram was sent to Sulak's half-brother who has a different family name as direct contact could have proved too risky. During the days that followed, Sulak's wife was interrogated by the police and many of the books distributed by his firm were removed from his stores and burnt on the streets. "One volume of poems by Angkarn Kalayanaphong was burnt simply because the book had a red cover," Sulak recalled with amusement.

The popular *Social Science Review* magazine of which he was co-founder and which for 12 years had been the source of inspiration for students and intellectuals alike, was shut down.

Sulak called the BBC again only to learn that Puay Ungpakorn, then rector of Thammasat University, was being specifically targeted. He immediately called Puay's home in Thailand and learnt with relief that Puay was safe and had managed to escape - first to Germany and then to England.

"Thais living in England, at least the ones I knew, were not happy. We considered the massacre an undemocratic act. The mass media in England strongly condemned the government, especially the British educated new prime minister [Thanin Kraivichien] for resorting to such brutal measures."

As Sulak learnt more about the many deaths and the brutality of the soldiers, his sadness and anger increased. "At no point in history were students forced by the military to crawl on all fours, stripped from the waist up, their bodies covered with a maze of lacerations. It was as if they were pigs or some other kind of animal. Our society was never this barbaric."

Sulak had been due to travel to Paris but the events of Oct 6 pushed everything else from his mind. "The venerable Thich Nhat Hanh [a respected Zen Buddhist monk from Vietnam residing in France] was waiting for me at Charles De Gaulle Airport in Paris but I didn't show up. He was very worried. I had completely forgotten about my trip to France. I also found out that the interview the BBC Thai service had conducted with me had been cancelled."

Even as he cursed the Thai journalists for not having the courage to air the programme, Sulak woke up to the realities of his uncertain future. The prevailing political climate was one of intolerance: anyone not "with" the establishment was unwanted - an outcast. Sulak had become an alien within his own society for refusing to support the armed revolution of the pro-Socialists. Right-wingers regarded him as someone who could not be trusted.

Unable to go home, Sulak contemplated his future for quite some time. Some well-meaning friends

advised him to open an Indian restaurant.

"I didn't know when I could return home. But I knew that if Thanin [the PM] remained in power for 12 or 16 years with his policy of "guided democracy", Thailand would head straight back to the Stone Age."

After six months in England and another 18 months in the United States, Sulak was finally able to return home - yet another coup had removed the right-wing government from office.

"The most valuable lesson [that came out of the massacre] was that we should stand firmly with the 'truth'. The other lesson was that non-violence is a means of resolving conflicts."

Twenty years may have passed but, according to Sulak, many people still have a distorted image of the events.

"The people who invited to speak me at Thammasat today asked me not to mention retrospection. But I would like to ask if various institutions, newspapers and others have yet come to realise how they fell short of what they aspire to be as 'individuals of higher standing'. Did they see the hypocrisy within themselves?"

On the day rightists stormed the gates of Thammasat University, Dr Krasae Chanawongsa, minister for foreign affairs during the Chuan Leekpai government (1992 to 1995), was on a brief visit to London. Krasae was an MP at the time and had just returned from Spain where he had been a member of Thailand's delegation to a five-day Inter-parliamentary Meeting. Staring in disbelief at televised flashes of the Oct 6 uprising on the BBC and reading British newspaper accounts of the event, the doctor found it almost impossible to accept that such a bloody massacre had occurred in a Buddhist country like Thailand.

"After watching the report on the BBC, I was in a state of shock. All I could think of at that moment was that democracy in Thailand was going backwards, that the parliamentary system was collapsing and, worst of all, innocent people were being killed. I was extremely concerned about the security of my country's citizens," he said.

"Such an event should not have happened in a society that is based on the Buddhist philosophy. Thais are, for the most part, Buddhists. We often talk about morality and humanity. So what do these words mean? Why did they have to kill each other? Why so much violence? Why didn't they sit down and talk together?"

"I lost all hope for the future of Thailand. To my mind, there was no hope left for the Thai political system. It was quite dark," he said.

Dr Krasae returned to his country two months after the bloody uprising. He soon discovered that there was a vast difference between the way the massacre had been reported overseas and in the Thai media.

"The foreign news made me excited, frightened and worried about Thai society. But the way it was presented in Thailand was different. It was quiet, [nothing violent or bloody had happened]. But the reason was obvious - the Thai mass media at that time was being tightly controlled by government," criticised the doctor.

It was these violent, immoral and inhumane actions by the government and the military against Thai

citizens - adolescents and adults, men and women, students and teachers - that fuelled his decision to retire from the Thai political arena.

Soon after, Krasae left for the United States where he became a lecturer at New York's University of Columbia. He returned to Thailand in 1977 and joined the more democratically-inclined government led by Gen Kriangsak Chomanan (1977-1980). Krasae was a member of the government committee which finally pushed the constitutional draft of 1978 through parliament. This was used until that fateful Saturday in 1991 when the National Peace-Keeping Council (NPKC) seized power in a quiet coup.

Looking back, Krasae views the 1976 massacre as a turning point in Thai society and in the Thai political system. In his opinion, although it was not obvious at the time, the Oct 6 blood-letting was key in shifting the Kingdom away from the dark ages of dictatorship towards a more enlightened democracy.

"When we suffer from disunity, we desire peace. But it is this disunity that subsequently initiates the peace process. In the final stage, we try to bring democracy to the country," said Krasae who is currently a member of the Palang Dharma party.

"I think Thai society learnt many lessons from those events. We have to change our thinking, particularly in terms of generosity. What we should do is to be generous about different ways of thinking, different ideas. This will help us to avoid disunity," said the Khon Kaen born doctor.

It was the October massacre that bred the idea of decentralisation in Krasae's mind. As deputy minister for public health in 1979, he worked on creating a public health policy which would strengthen local health care structures. His objective was to allow all Thai citizens, particularly those living in remote rural area, to have access to health care.

"We tried to strengthen every level of local agencies so as to benefit the people up-country. That was the first time that a public health policy was clearly drafted," he said.

In 1976, Mayun Visetkul was a Democratic Party MP and secretary general of the Thai Parliamentary Union. He was the leader of the Thai government's delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting in Madrid, Spain and consequently was not an eye-witness to the massacre.

Mayun intended to return to Thailand at the end of the conference but cancelled his flight after receiving a telegram from Thailand. The telegram's read: "Terrifying massacre. The extreme right in power. Those in vulnerable positions must be careful."

"I felt sad that those who fought for social justice were all being branded as communists," said Mayun.

"Foreigners were also very surprised. British friends asked me if Thailand was sliding back to barbarism. They thought that all conflicts could - and should - be resolved through peaceful means," he said, recalling his prolonged stay in London after the bloodshed.

According to Mayun, Thai students studying in England and English people were aware of what was going on and gathered in groups to speak out against the events. Although disappointed at what had occurred, Mayun was still optimistic about the future of Thai society.

"No. I didn't feel hopeless. I felt that hope lay with the next generation," he said.

Unlike Krasae, Mayun does not view the 1976 massacre as a turning point in Thai society. Instead, he considers that the country changed direction following the Oct 14, 1973, uprising.

"Oct 6 was not a turning point in itself, but Oct 14 was. Oct 6 was the price we had to pay [for that turning point]," he said.

However, the Oct 6 massacre was a personal turning point for him. "At that time I kept a low profile, fearing for my own safety. I left the future to the next generation. I became an MP hoping that I could contribute to solving the country's problems. I soon realised that it was impossible. Today's MPs are even worse if we are speaking about quality. Those of dubious origins have become politically powerful," he said.

For the last 20 years Mayun has absolutely refused to be part of the political arena and has stopped all involvement in social issues. Before 1976, Mayun was one of the country's leading environmental activists. He was the secretary-general of the Association for Environment Preservation (one of the first "green" NGOs in Thailand).

For him, the message gained from the massacre is the same as that of Thai society as a whole.

"It's not true that people in a Buddhist society don't kill each other. I have come to agree with Cicero: 'Humanity is only the fertiliser for ideology'. It's not worth dying in a clash between ideologies. The society will evolve by itself," concluded Mayun, who is now an engineer.

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The massacre of unarmed students at Thammasat University on Oct 6, 1976 is still an open wound for those caught up in that bloody episode of Thai history, but a wound, the full extent of which, very few of the younger generation are aware. And a closer look at the history textbooks used by secondary school (Matthayom) students reveals why this is so.

Roughly 80 per cent of Matthayom-level history textbooks make no mention whatsoever of the massacre. Considering that most of them dedicate an absurd number of pages to pre-democracy-era Thailand - the sort of history that teachers seem to delight in forcing down students' throats - this is an outrageous omission, given the repercussions that event had on modern Thai history.

For instance, *Prathet Khong Rao* (Our Country) 2, a book for Matthayom 1 students by Prasanmitr

Publishing, devotes only a few lines to describing the upheaval that led to the change from military dictatorship to an emerging democracy in the wake of the mass street demonstrations on Oct 14, 1973. From page 39: "... [in] the Oct 14 event, students and the general public successfully united to demand democracy from the government. This resulted in the endorsement of the 1979 Constitution which made Thailand's political changes develop into more democratic ones." This facile description risks insulting the intelligence of the 12- and 13-year-olds who have to read it as part of their course.

A slightly more mature version can be found in *Prathet Khong Rao 4*, a textbook for Matthayom 3 by Watthana Phanit Publishing. The writer recognises the losses of life involved in the changeover to democracy but glosses over what actually happened in 1976. From page 116: "... the government used armed force to *suppress* [our italics] [the uprising] and the situation blew up. The bloodshed on Oct 14, 1973 resulted in deaths and injuries. Certain groups of people became angry and started burning government buildings and vehicles ..."

The book then shifts its attention to the promulgation of the 1974 Constitution which, it claims, completely resolved all the questions raised by the '73 conflict. It ignores the issues that led to the bloodshed in 1976. With the benefit of hindsight, the writer's closing comments on this chapter of history seem particularly ironic: "... [the changeover to] democracy is not always a smooth process. Thailand's political problems continue. This is a part of history that we must continue to study."

Twenty years later, we are still waiting for the fruits of this "study".

The same kind of "happily-ever-after" attitude prevails in most of the textbooks that *do* discuss what happened in 1976. They tend to avoid twisting a knife in the wounds by oversimplifying the situation and providing minimal details.

One example of this can be found on page 67 of *Prathet Khong Rao 4*, another Mathayom 3 textbook with the same title as the volume already mentioned but issued by a different publisher (Aksorn Charoentat Publishing). This says the '76 massacre was sparked by the mass public protests that greeted the return from exile of Field Marshalls Thanom Kittikachorn and Praphat Charusathien - two of the "Three Tyrants" blamed for the bloodshed three years earlier. But even so, the writer fails to mention the pair by name. "... The student and public gatherings to protest the ex-prime minister's and ex-supreme commander's return to Thailand continued [to grow] strongly, [moving] from Sanam Luang to Thammasat University. At the same time 13 resistance groups stepped out to denounce the aforementioned protest. On Oct 6, 1976, at 6 am, police stormed into Thammasat University to stop the student protest."

Not surprisingly (given the faint-hearted tenor of its previous remarks) the textbook stops short of mentioning the bloodbath that followed.

Thai Watthana Phanit Publishing's *Soc 605* for Mathayom 6 is a little more meticulous; it makes an attempt to examine the climate of conflicting ideologies that prevailed between 1973 and '76. From page 63: "The pro-democracy movement following Oct 14, 1973, was opposed by several groups who saw it as being backed by the Communist Party of Thailand. The reaction against the pro-democracy movement led to the *suppression* [our italics] of the students and the people on Oct 6, 1976 ... The arrest of pro-democracy activists, especially during the civilian dictatorship of Thanin Kraivichien [sworn in as prime minister on Oct 8, 1976] drove a large number of students and people to [flee to] the jungle where they joined the Communist Party of Thailand."

Probably the worst, most irresponsible account of all is that given by Watthana Phanit Publishing's *Soc 605* which, ironically, claims to give a "well-balanced treatment of the social sciences". Written by Dr Thaemsuk Numnon *et al*, *Soc 605* contents itself with a table which lists all the coups d'etat in modern Thai history and the excuses given by the coup-makers for their actions. Since the writers fail to include any opposing views, this table might as well be called "108 reasons to stage a coup".

The entry for Oct 6, 1976, reads in part: "... Certain groups of students and [ordinary] people committed *lese majeste* with the intention of abolishing the institution of the monarchy, as part of a communist plan to take over the country in cooperation with Vietnamese communist terrorists. They also resisted police arrest and caused instability."

Only two textbooks have been bold enough to discuss these painful events with a degree of honesty and detail.

And one of them, surprisingly, was produced by the Education Ministry: *Prathet Khong Rao 4* aimed at Mathayom 3 students. It deals with the massacre under the heading "conflicts between democratic and dictatorial movements". Here's an excerpt from page 173:

"The situation which led to violence and caused Thais to kill each other started again on the morning of Oct 6, 1976. While students and members of the public were gathered at Thammasat University to protest Field Marshall Thanom's and Field Marshall Praphat's return to the country, an unidentified party ordered police and a group of armed people to attack and kill those at the gathering, resulting in a large number of deaths and injuries."

Although the writer's distaste for the violence comes across in no uncertain terms, the fact that he (or she) made no attempt to speculate on who might have been responsible for initiating the bloodshed ("an unidentified party") clearly shows the shortcomings of historical research in this country.

The other, and so far the best, book is *Soc 605* for Mathayom 6 published by Thai Watthana Phanit Publishing. Produced by Dr Charnvit Kasetsiri, an ex-director Thammasat University ("et al"), it gives a fairly detailed account of that fateful day, the events that led up to it, the dangerously different lines of thinking between left and right-wingers, and a clear denouncement of the violence that ensued.

"Thailand's politics under the 1974 Constitution was [that of] a full democracy. Thai people were aware of and took a more active part in politics. However, having been oppressed by military dictatorships for 20 years, the demands [they] laid upon the government were enormous. The political arena was charged with conflicts. There was a critical confrontation of opposing ideologies between the ultra-left and ultra-right..."

Unfortunately, the book's attempt to remain impartial breaks down at this point. While left-wingers were described in bogeyman terms - "viewed by the ultra-right as a threat to Thai society and as communists who intended to abolish the institutions of nation, religion and monarchy" - the right-wing groups were painted in much softer hues: "viewed by the ultra-left as dinosaurs who refused to move with the times".

Soc 605 then launches into a disingenuous (to say the least) description of the massacre:

"The situation became more and more violent. Some literature and exhibitions led to the political anarchy on Oct 6, 1976. This can be regarded as a black page in Thai history because it was a brutal event in which Thai people killed each other and there were severe losses [scars], both material and

psychological."

And that, we're afraid, is as close to those horrific events as we will get by reading the textbooks.

If one picture tells a thousand words then most of those reproduced in school history books are mute. Telephoto shots of mass gatherings at the Democracy Monument hardly describe the horror as students were beaten, arrested and herded, half-naked, into police vans. The sole exception is the Education Ministry's *Prathet Khong Rao 4* which includes two close-up photos of the protesters. However we are also treated to photos of dictators in vain-glorious poses decked out in full-dress military uniforms complete with ceremonial maces.

Thais have often been accused of suffering from a bad case of mass amnesia. If this is true, then our academics must also accept a portion of the blame.

Why have they colluded in the suppression of important information about this period instead of helping us to understand, and hopefully cope to terms with what happened on the streets of Bangkok two decades ago?

Today is the eve of the 20th anniversary of this massacre. Maybe the time has come for them to rethink their attitudes. Mahatama Gandhi made the point that violence is an *unacceptable* way to resolve conflicts, no matter who is right and who is wrong.

If our elders are courageous enough to discuss the painful past in an open, non-biased way, perhaps those who were too young to witness these events themselves may yet prove that history does not necessarily have to repeat itself.

On Oct 6, 1976, hundreds of our compatriots made the ultimate sacrifice for a political system that many of us take for granted today; isn't it about time that the record was set straight and they were given their rightful place in our history?

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The main reason the group defected from the Solidarity Party was because its 11-seat party could not propose any bill to Parliament, he said.

The Constitution requires that a political party wishing to propose a bill must hold at least 20 seats in the House.

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New Cabinet members ruled valid

THE appointment of seven new Cabinet members by Prime Minister Banharn Silapa-archa on the same day he dissolved the House was constitutional, Cabinet secretary-general Vishanu Krua-ngam said yesterday.

Vishanu was responding to critics who had questioned the validity of the Sept 27 appointments of Gen Viroj Saengsanit, MR Thep Devakula, Chaiwat Wiboonsawat and four others. He said all the appointees, who were formally sworn into office on Thursday during an audience with His Majesty the King, were given their portfolios before Banharn dissolved the House. Viroj, Thep and Chaiwat had resigned from their respective bureaucratic posts before accepting their portfolios, he added.

He described the accusation that by dissolving the House, Banharn automatically lost his authority to present the appointees to HM the King, as unfounded.

Banharn was constitutionally allowed to do just that, he said, citing a precedent in Gen Prem Tinasulanonda's government.

Responding to accusations that Cabinet meetings after Sept 27 would be invalid because they lacked the necessary quorum, Vishanu said there were no rules imposing quorum requirements on Cabinet meetings.

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Two-day seminar on violence in society

THE number of activities beginning today at Thammasat University, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the October 6 massacre of students that took place on the campus, will include a two-day seminar on "Violence in Thai Society".

Dr Chaiwat Satha-ananda, of Thammasat's Political Science Faculty and an advocate of the non-violent movement, will open the discussion. He will be followed by his faculty colleague Dr Kittisak Prokati, whose topic is "Death Penalty: Some Thoughts about Freedom in Life and Body".

Other speakers and their subjects scheduled for the first day of the seminar include:

Dr Puangthong Rungsawadisap, on "The Use of Violence in Thai Foreign Policy: The Case of

Cambodia",

Nakarind Mektrirat and Bussarin Tosukhumwongse, on "Tabooed Books",

Narumon Tapchumpol, on "Assassinations of Farmer Leaders and Violence in the Thai Society from Intha Sriboonruang to Thong-in Kaewwatta", and

Yuki Mukdawichit, on "October 6: The Symbol of Violence, Violence of the Symbol".

Speakers scheduled for Sunday afternoon's seminar include:

Dr Thongchai Winitchakul, who teaches in the United States at the Wisconsin University in Madison, who will speak on "Memory and Forgetfulness of October 6: History of Violence in the Thai Society",

Chalida Songsamphan and Chaiwat Satha-ananda will present their studies on "Rape: Cultural Violence in the Thai Society" and "Grilling a Baby's Body: An Analysis of Cultural Violence in the Thai Society", respectively.

The seminar will take place in the Law Faculty's LT 1 Lecture Hall. Seminar times are from 9 am to 5 pm today, and from 1 pm to 5 pm on Sunday.

On Sunday morning a procession of 106 monks will collect alms on the university's main soccer field, followed by religious rites, in memory of those who died on Oct 6, 1976.

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THE NATION

Editorial

Sunday, October 6, 1996

First remember, then grieve, finally forgive

In "A Time to Kill", currently playing at moviehouses in Bangkok, the inherent division in American society is portrayed rather gruesomely. There is a lurking evil in men and history has shown that brothers can turn against each other and neighbours who have lived in harmony for decades can in the name of religion, skin colour, ethnicity, nationalism or ideology, slit each other's throats.

[Full Story](#)

Chavalit's aspiration dashed again

The election campaign in the next six weeks promises to be very entertaining despite the uncertain prospects for our political and economic future. Even before the dust from the dissolution of Parliament had a chance to settle, ex-House members of all colours and stripes were busily switching camps. A new political journey of the damned has begun.

[Full Story](#)

LETTERS

20 years later

Twenty years have passed and I still cry whenever I think about the event. I was there at Thammasat, being a first-year student from Mahidol at that time. Early in the morning I sat in the football field, adjacent to the Department of Commerce. That was where Mahidol students stayed. I was with a group of six students, all guys, all my friends. We were one of the several guard groups. I was the leader of that group.

[Full Story](#)

First remember, then grieve, finally forgive

In "A Time to Kill", currently playing at moviehouses in Bangkok, the inherent division in American

society is portrayed rather gruesomely. There is a lurking evil in men and history has shown that brothers can turn against each other and neighbours who have lived in harmony for decades can in the name of religion, skin colour, ethnicity, nationalism or ideology, slit each other's throats.

While a "Time to Kill" is about underlying hatred and prejudice in the United States, the parallels can be drawn to the events of Oct 6, 1976 in Thailand. Two decades ago, a paroxysm of violence was unleashed against students and political activists holed up in Thammasat University. The forces of change, fuelled by demands for economic justice and political freedom, came into violent conflict with those who were bent on showing extensive support for the existing status quo prevailing.

Challenging the status quo

Marxism gave the student radicals a method of critical analysis with which to attack the status quo. It gave them an alternative conception of society and promised the inevitability of revolutionary success. Marxism also divided the student leaders from the followers and from the general public who wanted democracy and social justice, but within the general existing framework of law and custom.

But as researcher Dr Yuangrat Wedel points out in her seminal work "Radical Thought Thai Mind: The Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Thailand", the brand of Marxism adopted by the student leaders would not have taken root in the country, for the simple reason that it was based on romantic notions. Unlike the ideology of the Communist Party of Thailand, the students adapted their brand of Marxism to fit with Buddhism and mixed it with Thai social conceptions.

The Oct 14, 1973 overthrow of the Thanom-Prapas military government imbued the student radicals with tremendous optimism about what could be done and how quickly. "The victory through mass demonstrations suggested that this was the method to employ at every point in the struggle. While the radicals of the 50s and 60s had been writers and teachers, the student radicals were also organisers and activists. They knew how to arrange noisy demonstrations and made this their favourite tactic," writes Dr Yuangrat.

At the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand last Wednesday, journalists, businessmen and a number of foreign diplomats watched in horror the footage of killings, when ultra-rightist groups with the aid of the police stormed the gates of Thammasat University in the early hours of Oct 6, 1976. The videotape showed unarmed students being fired upon by policemen and dragged across the campus.

At Sanam Luang, it showed right-wing mobs attacking students and throwing their unconscious bodies into a pile which was then set on fire. Bodies were also hung on trees and brutally beaten with chairs and poles. The unthinkable had happened in a country which prides itself on Buddhist compassion, understanding and compromise.

Conspiratorial silence

Twenty years later, a conspiratorial silence still prevails and the truth about Oct 6 remains one of the most sensitive issues for the Thai state and entrenched institutions in the country.

However, dwelling on the painful past will not bring back to life the scores that were killed in Thammasat and the purge that followed afterwards. Neither will it bring back the many dozens who went "missing", whose bodies have yet to be recovered.

But if ever there is to be healing from the traumatic events 20 years ago, there has to be remembering and grieving. We owe it to the families and loved ones of the students who died to educate the younger generation about what really happened on that day. The knowledge and understanding of Oct 6, 1976, will then help us to forgive.

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Chavalit's aspiration dashed again

The election campaign in the next six weeks promises to be very entertaining despite the uncertain prospects for our political and economic future. Even before the dust from the dissolution of Parliament had a chance to settle, ex-House members of all colours and stripes were busily switching camps. A new political journey of the damned has begun.

Those known to have a flair for shifting loyalties and obedience to the highest bidder are now scurrying around, looking for new paymasters to fill their campaign coffers - a necessary prerequisite, if he or she wants to ensure a winning place in big-money politics.

The New Aspiration Party of Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was just like a magnet in the early days after the dissolution, attracting many hopeful MPs. If the flow continues until the date of candidacy is set, NAP could be the largest gallery of rogues or a formidable den of the long fangs.

Initially, a large chunk of defectors from Chat Thai Party, led by former secretary-general Snoh Thienthong, made a big splash in the gutter politics prevailing in the country, thus making the former Army chief feel more confident of a victory on Nov 17 - the day where votes will be cast nationwide.

Snoh, portrayed as a tough guy from the east, must have regretted by now his hasty decision after breaking away from the party where he had spent 20 years as a heavyweight with a huge following. His mutiny and departure were influenced mainly by too many lies fed to him, and unfulfilled promises of a plum Cabinet job.

If he thought that the party leader had made an unforgivable mistake, he should have mustered enough support to mount a challenge and elect a better one. But he was not confident of the backing within the party which has been ridden with factional rivalries, turf battles, and conflicts of vested interests.

Alas! Snoh could again be seen as a man who has always been taken for a free ride. Just days after leaving Chat Thai and party leader Prime Minister Banharn Silapa-archa in a weaker position, some of the defectors again made a sharp turnaround and headed for the old camp, ignoring the beck and call of Chavalit's greener pasture.

It was another laugh which Banharn could have at the expense of former allies and adversaries, after sending all House members back to their constituencies to again beg for mercy from the unhappy voters. The Chat Thai leader, despite the erosion of his power, still has his war chest at his complete disposal.

The defection also makes the new Chat Thai much less repulsive. Many of the cutthroats and shady characters with notorious backgrounds have departed to cause headaches to other parties so that they can live up to their legend of being strong upholders of gutter politics.