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TITLE: SUBJECT: THAI EDITORIAL CALLS FOR STRONG GOVERNMENTAL LEADERSHIP AGAINST NARCOTICS

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SUBJECT: THAI EDITORIAL CALLS FOR STRONG GOVERNMENTAL LEADERSHIP AGAINST NARCOTICS

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SUMMARY: ON SEPTEMBER 18, THE LEADING BANGKOK ENGLISH DAILY, THE BANGKOK POST, RAN AS ITS LEAD EDITORIAL A STRIKING ANALYSIS OF THE DISASTROUS EFFECTS PABLO ESCOBAR'S DRUG TRAFFICKING HAS HAD ON COLOMBIA. THE POST ARGUES THAT OFFICIAL CORRUPTION AND A GENERAL BELIEF THAT DRUG TRAFFICKING IS NOT A DOMESTIC CONCERN CONTRIBUTED TO THE MORAL DEGREDDATION THAT LED TO THE PRESENT CRISIS. THE POST CALLED FOR STRONG GOVERNMENTAL LEADERSHIP IN THAILAND TO COMBAT DRUGS AND ARGUED IN PARTICULAR FOR THE INSTITUTION OF MONEY-LAUNDERING LAWS. THE FULL TEXT OF THE EDITORIAL IS REPORTED BELOW. END SUMMARY.

BEGIN TEXT: TITLE: ESCOBAR'S EVILS POISON A NATION

THE SCANDAL OVER DRUG WARLORD PABLO ESCOBAR IN COLOMBIA IS MORE THAN A NATIONAL TRAGEDY - OR COMEDY. IT IS STARK ILLUSTRATION OF THE TRULY DARK SIDE OF THE POLITICS OF NARCOTICS. ESCOBAR AND HIS MEDELLIN GANG HAVE OUTSPENT, OUT-GUNNED AND OUT-FINAGLED COLOMBIA'S GOVERNMENT, AND ITS VAST MAJORITY OF PEACEFUL CITIZENS. NOW, ARGUABLY, ESCOBAR IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MAN IN COLOMBIA. HIS TERRORISTS HAVE KILLED HUNDREDS OF HIS COUNTRYMEN. HIS DRUGS HAVE ENSLAVED AND CORRUPTED MANY HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF OTHERS.

REVIEW AUTHORITY: James Cooper, Senior
Reviewer

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COLOMBIA AND ESCOBAR ARE ONLY THE MOST EXTREME EXAMPLE OF THE ULTIMATE CORRUPTION THAT DRUG-DEALING CRIMINALS CAUSE. IN MANY COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD, SOCIAL FABRIC IS STRAINED ALMOST AS BADLY AS IN COLOMBIA, AND HEADED FOR WHAT COULD BE THE SAME SORRY ENDING. THIS INCLUDES BOTH COUNTRIES WHICH PRODUCE NARCOTICS, AND THOSE WHICH CONSUME THEM. THERE ARE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FOR THAILAND IN THE ESCOBAR-COLOMBIA SCANDAL. DRUG USE CONTINUES TO INCREASE HERE, AND THERE IS NO SIGN OF FALLING PRODUCTION OF OPIATE NARCOTICS. WHILE THE MASSIVE CORRUPTION FROM THESE SAD FACTS HAS NOT CREATED A "THAI ESCOBAR" - YET - THIS IS ONLY SLIM CONSOLATION.

COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT CESAR GAVIRIA TRUJILLO BELIEVED HE HAD STRUCK AN ACCEPTABLE, FACE-SAVING DEAL WITH ESCOBAR LAST YEAR. THE DRUG DEALER SURRENDERED TO MR. GAVIRIA, AND AGREED TO BE LOCKED UP IN A RESORT FACILITY CONSTRUCTED TO HIS OWN SPECIFICATIONS. THE JAIL FROM WHICH ESCOBAR ESCAPED WAS ADORNED WITH JACUZZIS, SAUNAS, WET BARS, FAX MACHINES, WIDE SCREEN TVS, COMPUTERS AND EVEN WEAPONS. THE PRESIDENT HAD LITTLE HOPE OF GETTING A BETTER DEAL FROM ESCOBAR. COLOMBIA'S ENTIRE TAX INCOME LAST YEAR WAS USDOLLARS 4.3 BILLION, AND ITS LEGAL EXPORTS TOTALLED JUST UNDER USDOLLARS 7 BILLION. ESCOBAR AND HIS ASSOCIATES, ON THE OTHER HAND, SENT USDOLLARS 11 BILLION WORTH OF COCAINE ABROAD, AND ENDED UP WITH A PROFIT OF USDOLLARS 7 BILLION. WITH ECONOMICS ALONE, ESCOBAR COULD, LITERALLY, BUY COLOMBIA.

THE PROBLEM WITH MR. GAVIRIA'S DEAL WITH THE DRUG WARLORD WAS THAT ESCOBAR TIRED EVEN OF HIS LUXURY JAIL. LAST JULY, HE "ESCAPED," AND EXPOSED THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE DEAL WITH THE PRESIDENT. COLOMBIANS NOW BELIEVE, AS A PROMINENT JOURNALIST WROTE RECENTLY, THAT "THE GOVERNMENT CAN NO LONGER PRETEND TO BE IN CONTROL." THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN COLOMBIA'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE IS THE DRUG WARLORD.

THE ROAD TO SUCH MORAL DEGRADATION WAS A LONG ONE. IT INCLUDED THE BUYING OF CORRUPT POLICE AND GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIALS, WILLING TO TURN A BLIND EYE TO NARCOTICS IN RETURN FOR MONEY. IT EXPLOITED THE COMPLACENCY OF A POPULATION WHICH FELT THAT EVEN THOUGH THE DRUG TRADE WAS BAD, ITS EFFECTS WOULD NOT TOUCH THEIR LIVES.

THIS IS THE CHIEF ARGUMENT FOR WHY THAILAND NEEDS LAWS WHICH PERMIT A LOOK AT BANK ACCOUNTS BY QUALIFIED INVESTIGATORS, A PROPOSAL WHICH IS NOW UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERATION. A BALANCE MUST BE STRUCK, CERTAINLY BETWEEN THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY OF BANKS AND THEIR CLIENTS. BUT EFFECTIVE MEASURES AGAINST MONEY-LAUNDERING ARE NECESSARY. AMASSING HUGE AMOUNTS OF CASH, AND TURNING DIRTY MONEY INTO CLEAN, HAVE BECOME SPECIALTIES IN SOME QUESTIONABLE FINANCIAL CIRCLES. SOCIETY, TOO, HAS THE RIGHT TO AVOID CORRUPTION AND TO ELIMINATE EVEN THE RICHEST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL CRIMINALS.

SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF DRUG-DEALING IS NOT AN EASY TASK. BUT IS ONE WHICH MUST BE TACKLED, BOTH BY OUR OWN GOVERNMENT AND BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. ESCOBAR AND HIS COUNTERPARTS LIKE KHUN SA AT OUR OWN BORDER WERE NOT ELECTED TO THEIR POSITIONS AS WARLORDS. THEY BOUGHT AND KILLED THEIR WAY TO POWER. ALONG THE WAY, THEY KILLED RIVALS AND INNOCENTS. PERHAPS MORE TO THE POINT, THE CORRUPTION THEY SET IN MOTION CONTINUES TO SPREAD TODAY. EARLIER THIS YEAR, THAILAND'S IMAGE ABROAD WAS BLACKENED BY ALLEGATIONS THAT A PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER WAS INVOLVED IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING, EITHER PERSONALLY OR THROUGH ASSOCIATES.

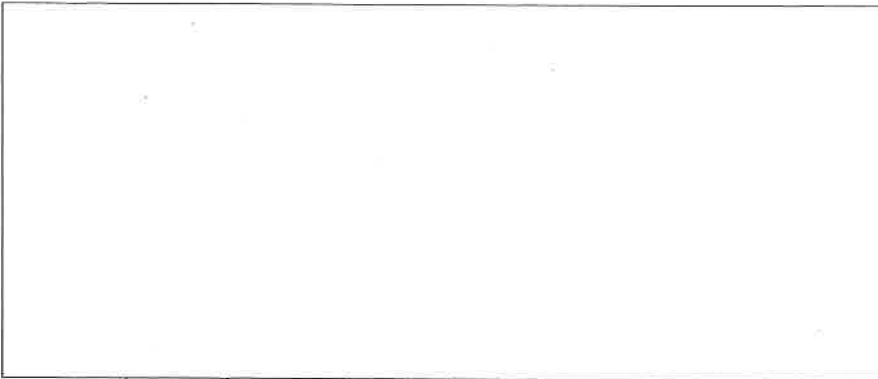
THERE ARE NOT TRUE WINNERS WHEN DRUGS ARE INVOLVED. THE INCREDIBLE PROFITS YIELDED IN THE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS TRADE ALLOW TRAFFICKERS TO BUY AND SELL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND, IN THE CASE OF COLOMBIA, THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF. LARGE NUMBERS OF DRUG USERS, SUCH AS IN BANGKOK TODAY, RUIN PART OF AN ENTIRE GENERATION, AND LEAD TO INCREASED CRIME. ANOTHER TRAGEDY THAT HAS ARISEN FROM THE SPREAD OF DRUGS IN THAILAND IS THE AIDS EPIDEMIC. THIS ILLNESS, TOO, EXPANDS FROM ADDICT TO ADDICT, AND THEN TO THE CHILDREN OF ADDICTS.

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COMBATTING USE OF DRUGS IS A NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY. WE
HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPECT LEADERSHIP IN THE BATTLE FROM
OUR GOVERNMENT. BUT ALL CITIZENS ALSO HAVE THE DUTY TO
DEMAND THAT OUR POLICE AND BUREAUCRACY RESIST THE LURE
OF DIRTY MONEY, AND DEAL WITH DRUG WARLORDS AND
TRAFFICKERS ACCORDING TO THE LAW. THE COLOMBIAN EXAMPLE
OF A NATION UNDER SIEGE BY A CRIMINAL IS HARDLY AN IDEAL
ANY COUNTRY WISHES TO COPY. HOPEFULLY, NO OTHER COUNTRY
WILL PERMIT IT. END TEXT. LAMBERTSON

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