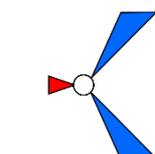


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bncdoc.id	ABH
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bncdoc.title	The Economist.
bncdoc.info	The Economist. Sample containing about 61979 words from a periodical (domain: commerce)
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<1279/c>	<p>first. On January 19th the American embassy in Bangkok told the police that weapons and explosives had been moved out of 'an embassy of an Arab country involved in the war'. The Americans refused to confirm publicly that the embassy was Iraq's. Westerners in Bangkok were advised to keep their heads down for 48 hours. The assumption was that the police had been given enough information to pick up the terrorists quickly. But they were not nabbed, and the warning was extended by a week. At buildings considered potential targets soldiers took over from police. Diplomats expressed no more than disappointment at the lack of progress (but that's why they are diplomats). For their part, Thai officials reject the suggestion of a link between the failure to get the would-be bombers and the sacking of the national police chief, Police-General Sawaeng Thirasawat. But he was under a cloud anyway after his men failed to find who had placed a bomb in the office of Major-General Seri Temiyaveh, the head of the Bangkok police department's crime-suppression division. Right after the explosion, on January 8th, the prime minister said the bomber had to be found within two weeks. By midnight on January 21st no leads had been uncovered. General Sawaeng was sacked two hours later for 'ineptness'. General Seri has a reputation of being an honest copper. On taking office last year he told his men they must drop their 'vested interests' - a polite term for rake-offs from gambling dens, short-stay hotels and other sinful activities in Bangkok. The Siam Rath Weekly, a Thai-language magazine, claimed that junior police officers in the division could make 50,000-60,000 baht (\$2,000-2,400) extra a month from these sources; for senior officers, it could be as much as 5m baht a month. General Seri's predecessor as head of the crime-suppression division, and his leading opponent within the police force, is one of the graduates of the Chulachomkhalao Military Academy who now run the Thai armed forces. Thus the problems in the division became yet another battleground between the civilian government and the military. Faced with a loss of income, General Seri's officers attacked him in leaflets and graffiti. They lampooned him on the division's radio station. Newspapers speculate that the 11b of TNT that went off 25 minutes before the general arrived in his office was the next stage of this campaign. The public breakdown of discipline in the crime-suppression division has at last destroyed the faith of many Thais in the police. Organised crime and corruption have grown along with the rest of the economy. Local gangsters field private armies; intimidation and assassination of business rivals are commonplace. There are signs of increased activity in Thailand by the Japanese yakuza, Chinese triads and now by international terrorists as well</p> <p>. The appointment of General Seri was supposed to show the government's resolve to fight the criminals. It has shown instead how deeply entrenched the 'vested interests' have become. A quarrel in a far-away country, of which Asia knows nothing Practically all the governments and most of the people in Europe and North America back the alliance against Saddam Hussein. At the least, they understand something big is at stake. It is different in Asia. Our correspondents throughout the region report SADDAM HUSSEIN has fewer detractors in Asia, the American-led operation against him fewer sympathisers. Mostly, though, Asians find the whole</p>
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thing an embarrassing distraction that they wish would just go away. Seoul's English-language Korea Times caught the mood. Its interview with the Iraqi ambassador, published on January 16th just hours before the allies attacked, was dramatically headlined: 'Economy vital sector for Iraq-Korea ties'. Like it or not, however, Asian countries are inevitably being drawn into the conflict. The economic consequences are impossible to ignore. For the poor countries of the Indian subcontinent and for the Philippines, the loss of remittances from the hundreds of thousands of workers in Iraq and Kuwait pinches badly. For everyone in Asia, higher energy prices hurt even more. Petrol prices are up nearly 30% in South Korea, and supplies are down by perhaps half in India. The Philippines has succumbed to war fever. Shops in Manila have been stripped bare in panic buying, there have been runs on banks, and the government has advised city-folk to grow vegetables in their gardens and to stop ironing clothes to save energy. The terrorism that the West dreads has already struck in Asia. The Iraqis sent two of their own men to plant a bomb in an American-run library in Manila on January 19th. It went off prematurely, leaving half of one of the Iraqis on a nearby roof and the other under arrest. It worries Thailand that the bombers were carrying air tickets to take them back to Bangkok, which they had left for Manila in December. The day after their attack, the American embassy in Thailand gave warning that it knew of a 'credible threat' to American, British and Australian interests in Bangkok. The Thais suspect that Japan's Red Army Faction, which has old ties to Middle Eastern terrorism, may be involved. Asia's governments have responded to the war with varying degrees of enthusiasm, discomfort and cynicism. Top of the cynics is China. The Chinese have given just enough support to the allies to bring themselves back into favour with the western governments, particularly America's, that had spurned them after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989