



PRESS RELEASE

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Current Political Situation in Thailand

Background.

- Since 12 March 2010, demonstrators from the group called the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) that is supportive of former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, have been staging rallies in Bangkok, demanding the dissolution of the House of Representatives and holding of general elections. The demonstrators are composed of different groups with different underlying agendas.
- First, there are those legitimate grievances, including problems related to poverty, hardship, unfair treatment or economic and social disparities, which they want resolved. Like its predecessors, the present Government has been working to address the grievances through, among other things, implementation of various welfare and development schemes.
- Second, there are those who want to bring down the present Government in order to bring back former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, without having him serve his prison terms as sentenced by the Court on the criminal charge of conflict of interest.
- Third, there are those who are Marxist-Leninist ideologists who now work as strategists.
- In addition, there are violent instigators, armed with weapons and ready to use them, apparently infiltrating among the demonstrators.
- In their call for early elections, the protest leaders have focused on discrepancies in Thailand's democracy and the current political regime as their rallying point – employing class-based terms and interpreting Thai society in a manner that does not reflect the present situation. While such political demands can be made through peaceful assembly, using violent means to force a legitimate government out of office cannot be accepted. The present Thai Government came to power through normal, parliamentary means under a democratic system. Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva was voted prime minister by a majority in the House of Representatives in exactly the same manner and by exactly the same House as his two

predecessors, who had been disqualified due to violation of relevant laws. In fact, based on speeches and activities of the protest leaders, it is unclear if this is actually their only demands as there have also been talks about state power or the notion of “a new Thai state”.

- The connection among these various different groups – who earlier seemed to work separately – have now become clearer. Moreover, some members of the opposition party have now joined the UDD protest leaders on the stage at their protest sites. In this regard, the moves made by various personalities – be they from opposition parties or protest leaders to draw attention from the local and foreign media or to appeal to the masses in other provinces or diplomatic corps = are not co-incidental or unplanned.
- The former prime minister himself also has continuously provided support to these movements, covertly and overtly, not least by linking in through video, phone calls or other electronic means calling on and inciting the crowds to carry on with their rallies. Meanwhile, there are links with networks operating through various means such as the internet and other media who conduct activities and disseminate messages or information variedly verging on subverting the country’s monarchical institution and calling for a change in Thailand’s present political regime. All these have to be further looked into.

Recent Developments.

- At the beginning, the rallies had been largely peaceful. The Government has allowed these demonstrations as part of the exercise of the people’s constitutional right to peaceful assembly, regarding this as a process through which people can participate in the country’s political life. As the same time, to enable police, military and civilian officers to take measures to prevent and contain the situation from escalating, the Government had to invoke the Internal Security Act (ISA).
- The demonstrations nevertheless escalated, with protestors occupying the business district around Ratchaprasong Intersection, blocking areas and roads and storming into the Parliament building, while defying efforts by the authorities to enforce the law. Their rallies thus transformed from what was peaceful assembly to unlawful action beyond the limit sanctioned by the Constitution, causing serious disruption to the daily life of the general public, as well as having a severe economic and social impact upon the country.
- In response, the Government on 07 April 2010 declared a severe emergency situation pursuant to the Emergency Decree in the areas of Bangkok and some district in nearby provinces in order to empower officials concerned to restore normalcy and return the areas occupied by demonstrators to the general public.

- In discharging their duties, the security officers – military, police and civilian – have been provided with clear procedures governing their operations, undertaking measures only as necessary and proportionate to the situation. Due consideration have been given to people’s rights and safety. They also have established rules of engagement for crowd control in accordance with international standards. Among others, they are permitted to use live bullets only in two cases, namely, to shoot warning shots into the air and to defend themselves when their lives are threatened.

Incidents on 10 and 22 April 2010

- On 10 April 2010, while security officers were trying to enforce the law by asking the demonstrators to give back the areas they occupied around Phan Gah Bridge, they were met with strong resistances from the demonstrators in various forms, including the use of lethal weapon by unknown persons, leading to over 20 deaths and several hundred injured among both the security officers and demonstrators as well as innocent bystanders.
- The Government regrets the losses that occurred. The Government also regrets underestimating the readiness of some individuals and groups to use lethal weapon to harm fellow Thais – be they demonstrators, bystanders or security officers – to worsen the situation and instigate further violence.
- Investigations are being conducted into what actually transpired. In addition to the investigation conducted by the authorities led by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), the Prime Minister has established a fact finding commission to look into the incidents. The Government also stands ready to cooperate with similar efforts by independent agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which has already initiated an inquiry process of its own. Meanwhile, security measures will be improved and further strengthened to better prevent recurrence of similar incidents.
- However, judging from evidence and video footage taken by both the local and international media, it is clear that there were terrorist elements infiltrating among the demonstrators who used war weapons, leading to loss of lives and injuries on both sides. Photographs and video footages show that tear gas launchers, M67 hand grenades, M79 grenade launchers, AK 47 machine guns as well as improvised weapons were used against security officers who were not equipped with these types of weapons. Those committing such acts must be held accountable.
- As for the incident on 22 April 2010, while a group of people – comprising residents in the Silom area and those described by the media as “multi-coloured shirts” – gathered on Silom Road at Saladaeng Intersection to express their opposition to the UDD, M79 grenades from

unknown person(s) were fired into the former group, resulting in one death and injuring several others. This incident is also being investigated.

- Meanwhile, remedies have been given to those affected – on both security officers’ and demonstrators’ sides – by the unfortunate incidents. The Government is also working on measures to help ease the effect of the prolonged protests, especially for employees who cannot earn their living due to closure of businesses.

Approaches to Resolving the Situation.

- The overall objective of the Royal Thai Government in addressing the current political situation is not merely to return normalcy to the areas affected by the protests. It is also working to maintain the rule of law, return normalcy to the country and protect the country’s principal institution from being drawn into the political conflict. Both the security and political solutions must be resolved and grievances addressed. Importantly, any solution must not result in creating a political norm which allows the use of terrorist means, violence, intimidation or threats to force or overthrow a legitimate government and achieve political ends, as this is related to the future of democracy.
- The Prime Minister has stated three sets of issues which the Government intends to address in tandem:
 - The first is about the grievances of the demonstrators on such issues as poverty, injustice and unequal treatment, which are problems that cannot be resolved within a short period of time.

The present Government recognizes its duty to tackle them and has since taking office implemented a number of measures, including through such schemes as income guarantee for farmers, free health care, free education, provision of subsistence support for the elderly, and measures to address the informal debt problems. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister is supportive of a civil society initiative to undertake a long-term structural reform in the country, which should help address various economic and social grievances as well as the issue of governance.

- The second is about the political demands, including Constitution amendments and the dissolution of the House of Representatives, which must be resolved politically through consultations.

On its part, the Government has not rejected these demands and has all along shown its readiness to engage in dialogue with the protest leaders. The Prime Minister

himself met with them twice and indicated his readiness to dissolve the House of Representatives in nine months, providing sufficient time for crucial conditions to be met. First, various problematic provision in the Constitution should be amended and put to the people through referendum, so that mutually acceptable election rules will be in place. Second, a conducive environment has to be achieved so as to enable politicians of all parties to campaign.

- The third is about the breaking of the law and matters of security and the safety of the public, particularly acts of violence by perpetrators who can be regarded as “terrorists”. Based on evidence gathered by the authorities, these individuals have exploited innocent demonstrators to instigate unrest. They possess weapons of war which they have proven ready to use indiscriminately. In addition, prior to the incidents on 10 and 22 April including sporadic grenade attacks and firing of an RPG rocket at an oil reserve tank. Hence, from the Government’s point of view, this is a pressing problem and there is no alternative but for the authorities to enforce the law in accordance with the principle of the rule of law.

The Prime Minister has noted that there were various groups of people among the demonstrators, with some being subject to arrest warrants, some using violence and some being innocent people. By law, they cannot be treated in the same manner. In this regard, the authorities are working towards separating innocent demonstrators from those who have broken the law and thus must be subject to legal proceedings. Also, in light of the demonstrators’ attempts to spread distorted and incisive information, the authorities are making efforts to disseminate facts so that people understand the situation, including the unlawful nature of the present demonstrations. Nevertheless, there have been attempts to jam the broadcasting of such information, including the Prime Minister’s weekly television program on 25 April 2010.

- The authorities will continue to adhere to international standards, undertaking measures only as necessary and proportionate to the situation and working from light to heavier ones in accordance with the established rules of engagement. Their actions will also be guided by the relevant rulings of the Administrative Court and the Civil Court, which do not prohibit dispersal of the demonstrations but state that any measure to be taken must be as necessary and appropriate to the situation and in accordance with international standards.

30 April 2010
