

Newsletter:

Thailand Update

9 June 2014



WSDC

World Schools Debating Championship

2014 Bangkok
Thailand



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Dear all WSDC community

We have collected more news articles which could help you get a better picture of the real situation here in Thailand. We wanted to provide as much facts as possible so that you would have a better understanding. Later today, we will try to sent you a another newsletter with key questions that may help you answer parents and government agencies in your country.

News Summary

1. The military government is placing its priority on stability and security. It has stabilized food prices and has been successful in getting cooperation from opposition red-shirt leaders. This means that protests and conflicts are less likely in the near future.
2. Elections are at least 15 months away. While this does may sound too slow for democracy, it is good for our tournament. Elections and election results have been the main cause of conflicts. The fact that it is relatively far away and that none of the groups that have been in conflict are complaining about it means that the situation in Thailand is less likely to deteriorate.
3. Curfews have already been completed lifted in three tourist spots. Bangkok is still under curfew, but only between 1-4 am (only 3 hours). People traveling to and from the airport are not subject to the curfew. Discussions are underway to further lifting of curfews, including in Bangkok.
4. FaceBook, Twitter, YouTube and other forms of social communication have not been restricted by the military government.
5. Governments in the region (including all members of ASEAN) have voiced their approval of proceedings in Thailand. The military government is actively seeking international understanding and cooperation. Since they are stressing that the coup in the Thai context is different to most areas, they are much likely to behave in ways that decrease security and infringe upon personal freedoms, especially those of international visitors.
6. Businesses and investments are continuing as usual.



Normality resumes: Curfews lifted in three Thai hot spots

By Karla Cripps, CNN

June 4, 2014 -- Updated 0724 GMT (1524 HKT)

(CNN) -- It's been nearly two weeks since Thailand's military took over the country after months of political and social unrest that led to outbursts of violence in Bangkok.

Only two weeks, the curfews been lifted in 3 tourist hot spots, with discussions to lift it in other areas including Bangkok in the near future)

But while the political situation is still in flux and no election date set, life in Thailand has resumed to something approaching normality.

(The election date haven't been set but a plan has been establish to be next year)

On Tuesday, the military government announced it was lifting the nation-wide curfew in three tourist hot spots -- Pattaya, Ko Samui and Phuket -- reportedly in response to pressure from the country's ailing tourism industry.

All other Thai destinations, including Bangkok, Krabi and Chiang Mai, remain under a daily curfew from midnight-4 a.m.

(The official announcement from the NPCO is from 1AM to 4AM, which is only 3 hours on the curfew; people traveling from and to the airport are not subject to a curfew)

However, air passengers with arrival and departure flights scheduled during the curfew are permitted to travel to and from the airports at any time, and are advised to carry a printout of their flight itinerary.

All airports in Thailand remain open and flights are still operating as scheduled.

(All airports are all function as normal with daily flights as scheduled)

Bangkok Post Elections 15 months away

THE NEWSPAPER YOU CAN TRUST

Published: 30 May 2014

An interim government will be formed in time to administer the state budget for the next fiscal year, but elections are at least 15 months away, coup leader Prayuth Chan-ocha said on Friday.

(The tentative schedule for the interim government and elections makes it much more satisfying to the general public because there is more certainty what direction we are heading. For the tournament it is better for security that the elections are far away, because elections and election results are the cause for the most amount of conflict.)

Gen Prayuth also outlined a broader plan to reform the country before returning it to a government elected under conditions that all people can accept.

Under the timetable he announced in a televised address, an election could be held in 15 months at the earliest.

In the first phase, expected to take two or three months, the focus would be on ensuring security and on reconciliation, he said.

In the second phase, expected to take about a year, legal experts will draft a temporary constitution. A national assembly will be set up and will choose a prime minister.

(Within 2 – 3 months, focus on public reconciliation and next year we will have a draft temporary constitution and setup an interim government)

In the meantime, he asked for understanding from Thai people as well as the international community, saying time was needed to make the necessary changes.

"We believe people will choose our Kingdom before a flawed democratic system," he said.

Gen Prayuth said the budget for the next fiscal year was being worked out for approval by the legislative body and a new government would be responsible for administering it.

An interim government will be formed after the legislative body, which is also tasked with selecting an interim prime minister.

The address was the first clear indication that the army chief intended to wash his hands of overseeing the budget, and it also provided the clearest timetable yet for reforms.

The army chief said the armed forces had no desire to prolong their stay.

"The country comes first, democracy can follow. We need time. When the mission is finished we will go back to normal military duty," he said.

He also promised a quick end to martial law and planned to ease curfews in some areas hit by a decline in tourists. (There has been discussion on removing the curfews in more locations including Bangkok so that it helps with tourism)

"If the situation return to normal in some tourism areas, the curfew will be eased," he said. "If the overall situation returns to normal, laws will be restored as soon as possible."

Gen Prayuth calls on visiting businessmen to encourage investors and tourists to return; promises new govt in 3 months

The Nation June 7, 2014 1:00 am

Junta chief General Prayuth Chan-ocha yesterday called on Chinese businessmen to help create a good understanding of the situation in post-coup Thailand in order to retain investments and tourists from China.

The chief of the ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) also said an interim government could be set up in three months in the third phase of its roadmap for national reconciliation.

Prayuth, who is also the Army chief, had said earlier that an interim civil administration could be created before the start of the next fiscal year on October 1.

(The army chief, have clear intention to establish a interim government within 2014, before the starting of the next fiscal year on October 1st. The intention of the military is to move forward on reform of the political situation)

The general met the group of visiting Chinese businessmen at the Royal Thai Army headquarters yesterday.

"Thailand will be China's strategic partner in all levels of cooperation for a long time," the junta chief was quoted as saying by NCPO spokeswoman Pattamaporn Rattanadilok na Phuket.

Though neighbouring countries such as China, Vietnam, Myanmar and Malaysia have voiced their understanding of the coup, several countries in the West, like the United States and Australia, have chosen to reduce their ties with the Kingdom.

(The military have received positive comments from China, Vietnam, Myanmar and Malaysia which he have sent out the acting foreign minster to meet even more countries to ask for their understanding about our reform plan)

At the meeting, Prayuth also asked the visiting businessmen - led by Thai Chamber of Commerce vice chairman Vichai Assarassakorn - for confidence in the country in terms of trade and investing in a corruption-free market.

The Chinese businessmen included representatives from several private sectors on the mainland including industry, banking, information and technology, home appliance, auto, fertiliser, mining and water-resource management.

Pattamaporn said the Chinese private sector wanted to affirm its intention of doing business in Thailand on all aspects as well as to strengthen ties between the two countries. He said Prayuth called on the Chinese visitors to have faith in Thailand as it would most certainly return to its old strength. He also called on them to help other investors understand the situation in Thailand and invite their countrymen to visit and invest in the Kingdom. (Currently Chinese business will still do business in Thailand and not leave the country, investment will still proceed forward)

"The NCPO is considering lifting curfew in some more areas as soon as possible," the general said. (NCPO considering lifting the curfew in other areas including Bangkok)

Pattamaporn went on to say that the NCPO chief also explained that it was necessary for the military to take charge of the country so the limitations of some regulations can be unlocked and laws put in place to help the country move forward.

"From now on, there will be transparency, fairness and auditability with no corruption for investments in Thailand. It will focus on public interest," Pattamaporn quoted Prayuth as saying.

He added that Prayuth was also concerned about the impact construction projects might have on people, hence public participation will be introduced in all projects right from the start.

Since the military took over last month, it has frozen the price of fuel for at least 30 days, as well as the price of meals in food courts and basic necessities for six months to help mitigate the burden on people. (NCPO have frozen fuel prices and meal prices in food courts around the country to promote stability)

Furthermore, Surasak Kanchanarat, another deputy permanent secretary of the Defence Ministry who is also the acting permanent secretary, will go on a three-day visit to China next Wednesday to forge military cooperation between the two nations.

The junta chief has considered lifting the curfew in other tourist destinations such as Hua Hin, Cha-am, Hat Yai and Krabi, NCPO secretary General Udomdej Sitabutr said.

Separately, a source revealed that General Prayuth was not basking in the glory of his new position, but was committed to putting the Kingdom on the path of reform after setting up an interim government.

In what appears to be a good sign for reconciliation, the junta says the leaders of all red-shirt groups nationwide have agreed to join a reconciliation forum with the military.

Published: June 9, 2014

Deputy junta chief Lt-General Kampanart Ruddit, director of the National Reconciliation Centre for Reform, said red-shirt leaders had agreed to join discussion processes for gathering opinions ahead of the setting up of a reform council and a national legislative assembly.

(The red shirt is the largest pro government group, and was against the coup. They have joined in the reconciliation process, which is a huge positive sign)

He said his centre hoped to finish reconciliation talks nationwide by August.

In Chiang Mai, red-shirt leader Petchawat Wattanapongsirikul, a former adviser to the Social Development and Human Security minister, ordered his followers in eight upper northern provinces to temporarily suspend political activities, pending the implementation of the National Council for Peace and order (NCPO) 'roadmap'. (This means that red shirts protests will be suspended, and no big official protests will occur)

He said if the 'roadmap' was fair, the red shirts should stop their movement. "We have witnessed different political colors because of social disparities. If this problem is solved, the red shirts will stop their movement," he said. A large picture of Petchawat and ex-premier Shinawatra has been removed from Petchawat's Chiang Mai hotel, the Warorot Grand Palace. In Suphan Buri, Maj-General Thiamsak Sukhanuyut, chairman of the Suphan Buri United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) and UDD chairman of nine central provinces, announced a decision to quit the political movement, Lt-Colonel Settawut Ammuang said.

He said Thiamsak informed Maj-General Sithi Piyasonthi, deputy director of the Suphan Buri Internal Security Operations Command, that he was washing his hands of politics as his previous political stance may have posed an obstacles to the NCPO's efforts to restore peace and order.

Thiamsak submitted a statement that said he was willing to cooperate and support the NCPO to achieve reconciliation.

In Nakhon Ratchasima, red-shirt leader Sompote Prasartthai said he and other local red-shirt leaders would seek to get people involved in their movement in Muang district to join the reconciliation activities at the 80th Birthday Stadium on Wednesday. Sompote was speaking at a Pheu Thai Party coordination centre.

(Another red-shirt leader confirming his cooperation in the movement of reconciliation)

On that day members of the People's Democratic Reform Committee and rival group the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship will participate in activities at the stadium, he said.

He said he had spoken with other local red shirts and most supported the reconciliation attempts. NCPO activities aimed at bringing about national reconciliation and dissolving political colors have continued for a second week.

A Reconciliation Centre for Reform (RCR) was established in Tak while people in Bangkok's Taling Chan district yesterday enjoyed a "Return Happiness to the People" fair at Wat Intrawat. The fair was organized by the district office in association with the military.

The event is part of efforts to bring about national reconciliation, led by NCPO chief General Prayuth Chan-ocha. The junta started staging fairs in Bangkok and the provinces last week. In Bangkok, city officials provided free physical check-ups, massages, haircuts and food and drink while military bands performed music for thousands of people.

On Thursday another fair will be held in Thawee Wattana district in the capital.

Further north, Mae Sot district chief Preecha Jaipet announced the setting up of a reconciliation centre for five border districts in Tak province in a bid to solve urgent social and economic problems and bring about national peace and unity.

Meanwhile, the 23rd Military Circle and the Miracle of Life Foundation as well as private agencies teamed up to carrying out reconciliation activities in Khon Kaen's Ban Fang district.

The groups provided poor villagers with two 2,000 litre water containers. Mobile medical teams provided physical check-ups and treatment.

Soldiers brought trucks to supply water to villages facing drought and helped villagers sweep a temple. They advised them to file a complaint with police if any group claimed to be soldiers and tried to search their houses.

(The military is engaging positively with the general public to create understanding on the reconciliation process)

Junta opens foreign front in PR blitz Sihasak leads charge against Western critics

Published: 6 Jun 2014 at 05.53

The military junta has kicked off an international public relations offensive in a bid to blunt mounting criticism from the West and to improve Thailand's post-coup global standing.

(It is clear that the military junta is trying to create understanding and build trust again with international relationships)

Permanent secretary for foreign affairs Sihasak Phuanketkeow said Thursday that the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has set a clear plan for implementation of its three-stage plan — reconciliation, reform and elections — to return electoral democracy over the next 15 months.

Mr Sihasak, who has assumed the responsibilities of acting foreign minister, said he plans to visit Asean countries as well as China, Japan and Australia to convince them of the junta's efforts to pursue elections.

(The acting foreign minister, is going to different nations to ask for their understanding and also to build a positive relationship – from the last newsletter all ASEAN nations have been supportive on the direction of the military; they have asked ASEAN nations to help further spread the understanding to other nations as well)

He was speaking during an official two-day visit to Vietnam on Thursday, where he met Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh.

After the meeting, he said Hanoi still sees Thailand as having an important role in the region and continues to regard it as a key strategic partner despite the military putsch.

Mr Sihasak said the Vietnamese government was confident Thailand would be able to resolve its own problems and that the political situation would improve soon.

(This reconfirms that nations in the region have faith and confidence in Thailand – Vietnam)

He said he also plans to meet foreign correspondents based in Thailand to clarify the post-coup situation, and would use “all channels of communication” to explain the situation to the international community and foreign reporters.

He believed the timeline set out by the NCPO should ease foreign countries' concerns.

As for countries that have scaled back aid or cooperation with Thailand following the coup, Mr Sihasak said it would better serve their interests to consider longer-term relations. Thailand still has global economic significance and will not disappear from the map, he said.

The US, Australia and several European countries have strongly condemned the coup.

Malaysia's Supreme Commander Tan Sri Dato' Zulkifeli bin Mohd Zin met Thai army leaders on Wednesday, while on Monday Mr Sihasak met Myanmar Foreign Minister Wanna Maung Lwin in Nay Pyi Taw to explain the need to stage the coup.

(This reconfirms that nations in the region have faith and confidence in Thailand – Malaysia)

As the junta ramps up its diplomatic offensive, international attention will likely remain focused on whether it continues to call in individuals for detention.

Since the May 22 coup, the junta has summoned hundreds of people for "discussions", detaining them for up to seven days.

Questions are being raised as to whether those detained upcountry are being treated in the same manner as those held in Bangkok.

Continued action along these lines is likely to prompt complaints by human rights groups, pressuring Western governments to speak out against the junta, a Western diplomat told the Bangkok Post.

(The detained people which was stated from May 22, have been released to their respective homes, but they aren't allow to leave the country without the NCPO approval)

The diplomat also said that it may be better for the junta not to dwell on its past actions — the reasons for the coup — in its diplomatic offensive.

"What's done is done," the diplomat said. "It would be more beneficial to concentrate on its plan for reform and elections."

(I think that this statement is very true, we have to consider the facts and the development of the situation)

Foreign Ministry spokesman Sek Wannamethee said Mr Sihasak will travel to Myanmar to attend a series of meetings, including the Asean Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit (EAS) between Saturday and Tuesday.

(Thailand is trying to their best, by going to EAS meeting with Japan, China, US, EU, etc to explain and assure people that we are moving forward)



Delegates from more than 20 of Asean's dialogue partners will attend the meetings, including Japan, China, India, the US, the EU, Australia, Russia and New Zealand.

On Tuesday Mr Sihasak will head to Geneva to attend a UN Human Rights Council meeting.

(The acting foreign minister is even going to Geneva to attend the UNHRC to explain on Thailand situation)

Mr Sek said Mr Sihasak will take advantage of those occasions to improve their understanding of the situation in Thailand.

NCPO spokesman Winthai Suvaree said coup leader Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha has stressed the need for all state agencies to step up public relations efforts to explain to foreign countries why the coup was necessary.

In the age of social networks, the junta risks alienating large sections of the community if it blocks popular platforms like Facebook and Twitter out of fear over what people say.



People now have the power to instantly connect and communicate with one another around the globe. To block people from expressing an idea on social media would not be smart.

There are many social network platforms but in Thailand the most popular one is Facebook, with over 26 million users, research shows.

If the junta blocks access to Facebook, people would not only lose faith in its leader but would simply try and connect with another social network site. They can jump from one social network to another quickly across all types of devices anywhere, anytime.

(The military junta haven't blocked the access of any social ideas in the kingdom; participants are fully allowed to access all popular social networking platforms)

* The blue is my personal additional comments, orange is highlighted from the general announcement

In a democratic country, every person has the legal right to communicate. If there are some groups of people using the social network inappropriately to convey false information, to spread hate speech and so on, and the country's leader decides to block all Thais from accessing the social network, it would not be fair on the great bulk of users.

There are cases in many countries where the country's leader identified social networks as the enemy.

The New York Times, for example, noted that Twitter roared in Turkey after an effort to block it. The Turkish government's attempt to block the site appeared to backfire, fomenting a loud and raucous backlash, with the hashtags #Twitterisblockedinturkey, #occupytwitter, #turkeyblockedtwitter, and #dictatorerdogan quickly trending globally.

According to Twitturk, which records the statistics of Turkey's roughly 12 million Twitter users, more than half a million tweets were posted in just 10 hours, despite the ban.

According to the non-profit Mother Jones Investigative Fund, China blocked Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in 2009. Iran has blocked Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube on and off since they were banned in 2009 following Iran's contentious presidential election.

In Vietnam over the past couple of years, there have been widespread reports of Facebook being blocked. And in September 2013, Vietnam passed a law prohibiting citizens from posting anti-government content on the social network. Facebook did not comment.

Instead of regarding the social network as the enemy, leaders should play with the big data generated from it and moved over the network ingeniously.

They should follow the lead of the business world on how to use the social network to engage with people, deal with a crisis, and satisfy people.