

Gist of the Joint Calls of Heads of Diplomatic Missions and
Heads of International Organizations Offices
upon H.E. Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont
12 October 2006 at the Outer Santi Maitri Hall, Government House

1. PM first made it clear to all that he never had any prior expectations of becoming Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand. The offer of the position, therefore, came as a surprise, but he decided to accept it for the sake of the country and the people. The Cabinet was formed by PM himself within the space of one week. The draft government policy is due to be approved by the Cabinet on 17 October 2006, after which it will be submitted to the National Legislative Assembly for consideration. Despite public criticism of the new Cabinet as being full of “old technocrats,” PM firmly believed that the vast experience of each Minister would be beneficial for the work of the Government.

2. PM is well aware of the limited time his government has. He has, therefore, set his work priorities and made them known on the first day of his assumption of office. The two main issues at the top of the Government’s agenda are: (1) the political situation in the country; and (2) the situation in the South. In addition, PM announced at the Cabinet meeting on 10 October 2006 four keywords -- transparency, justice, economy of resources and efficiency – that will be the guiding principles for his government’s work.

3. Regarding the political situation, the Government’s efforts would focus on expediting the country’s return to full democratic government and overcoming national divisions. The Government would proceed according to the timeline announced earlier to the public, i.e., the drafting of a new constitution and the organizing of free and fair elections within one year.

National healing and reconciliation would also be promoted through peaceful means and adherence to the rule of law and participation. For PM, Thai people can have different ideas, but such differences should not lead to national divisions and violence. Transparency and justice would also be key for solving the political problems of the country. PM would try his best to talk to, and keep in

close touch with, the people and assure them of the continuity of the government's policy to promote their welfare. In addition, PM would listen to people's concerns and try to ease their difficulties.

4. For the situation in the Southern provinces, PM has received several phone calls from his friends in the area, including local Muslim leaders, expressing their hope for the restoration of peace and harmony in the South under the current administration. There had been, in the past, several complaints regarding the behaviour of officials who treated the local people as second-class citizens. PM thus underscored the need to first educate those officials working on the ground and change their mindset. The officials must reach out to the local people and treat them with a better understanding, instead of looking down on them. Agencies dealing with the problems in the South need to be reorganized and new bodies might be required to promote close contact and communication with the local people.

PM asked for support from foreign countries, especially those Muslim countries in ASEAN (Malaysia and Indonesia), in promoting peaceful ways of living for the people in the South, despite the differences in religious beliefs, and moving forward the restoration of sustainable peace in the area. PM believed that he had a good feeling of what people in the South wanted and would like to have in the future.

5. Regarding the economy, PM gave an assurance that the momentum of the Thai economy would be maintained. At the same time, some of the previous government's initiatives or projects might be reviewed by the economic Ministers, using the 4 aforementioned keywords (transparency, justice, economy of resources and efficiency) as yardsticks. In international terms, there would be no change in Thailand's adherence to the market economy. Meanwhile, the promotion of Sufficiency Economy is meant for the Thai people so that they may keep this philosophy of His Majesty the King close to their hearts. During the past 5 years, PM was of the view that Thais tended to forget what had happened during the Economic Crisis and looked only at the bright side of economic development. Thai people must learn from the 1997 Economic Crisis and pursue a balanced way of doing business in order to avoid its recurrence.

6. On international affairs, PM assured the diplomatic corps/international organizations of foreign policy continuity. PM pointed out that Thailand was not a big country. The key to our survival would, therefore, be friendship with other countries. This would be the main thrust of our foreign policy. Whatever the previous government had committed to, at both bilateral and multilateral levels, would be carried out. Thailand will continue to cultivate close relations with all friendly countries as well as the United Nations.

PM vowed to maintain the ASEAN spirit and continue to enhance friendship and cooperation between Thailand and ASEAN countries. In so doing, PM looked forward to visiting ASEAN countries in the near future and to meeting all ASEAN Leaders at the ASEAN-China Commemorative Summit in Nanning, the People's Republic of China, between 30-31 October 2006. In addition, the Ayeyawady - Chao Phraya - Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) would also be further promoted. PM firmly believed that Thailand could not move forward alone, but should walk together with all ASEAN countries for the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole.

On the matter of displaced persons, PM mentioned that, according to some comments in newspapers, a lot of Myanmar displaced persons hoped for a better opportunity under the current government. PM assured the Heads of International Organizations Offices that the Government would make an effort to upgrade the living conditions of those displaced persons who might be the next generation and valuable human resources of their country. PM had personal experience in dealing with displaced persons from his previous work along the border areas with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar.

Thailand's return to full democratic government

7. Foreign Minister Nitya Pibulsonggram stated the following points in response to the reiteration of the "Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Situation in Thailand," dated 28 September 2006, by the Finnish Ambassador to Thailand :

- The Thai Government was well aware of the views expressed by Finland on behalf of the European Union. The EU and Thailand have had long, cordial and mutually beneficial relations. By living here on the ground with great knowledge of the development in this country, Thailand hoped that the Heads of the Diplomatic Missions

of the EU countries would be able to explain the difficulty Thailand faced and our political developments in such a manner that would bring clarity to all members of the EU.

- Martial law is a temporary measure. It was a firm conviction of the government to lift martial law as soon as the situation warrants.

- Regarding civil liberties, Thailand has made much progress towards restoring full and free liberties for all Thais. As observed nowadays, reporters are free to be anywhere or ask any question. People are free to express their opinions in this society.

- The Government is moving firmly on the path towards the restoration of parliamentary democracy.

8. On lifting martial law, PM clarified that the first Cabinet meeting on 10 October 2006 discussed this issue. The meeting decided that PM should raise this matter for discussion with the Council for National Security (CNS). PM personally agreed that the sooner martial law is lifted, the better it will be for the country. However, this issue was not his sole responsibility. According to the interim constitution, PM needed to confirm this with the CNS. And the lifting of martial law depended also on the situation and security concerns.

9. Regarding freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Thailand, PM assured that people could freely voice their opinions, including their disagreement with the coup or with martial law. PM added that no one had been taken into custody. Those who might have been questioned would certainly enjoy due process of law. Thailand is standing firm on the course to full restoration of parliamentary democracy. Steps have been taken in such direction. With this conviction in mind, the Government would seek to fulfill them by deeds. Thailand sincerely hopes that our friends will fully understand and allow us to work in our own way. Thailand also hopes that the diplomatic corps will convey all of the developments in this country to their respective capitals.

10. Concerning a new Constitution, a Constitution Drafting Committee to be appointed by the Constitution Drafting Assembly and the CNS will be responsible for this matter; however, the Government would closely monitor and work with the committee and contribute constructively to the drafting process. Should this process be concluded in less than one year,

PM would take it as a great success which would allow him to take a rest earlier than expected.

11. To organize free and fair elections is crucial for Thailand. We do not want unfree and unfair elections. Our lesson learnt in the past was that we had free and fair elections in form, but not in substance. The Government would make its utmost effort to correct this flaw. The politicians need to be convinced and the people, especially the younger generation, needed to be educated. This would be a long and difficult task.

12. Even though the National Legislative Assembly and the Constitution Drafting Committee would be appointed, PM believed that those bodies would be free to perform their duties, without interference from the CNS. PM was also appointed by the CNS and he could work freely thus far. PM believed that the CNS would not put any restriction on the work of such bodies as doing so would jeopardize the credibility of the CNS itself. After all, PM emphasized that actions must speak louder than words.

Sufficiency Economy

13. In putting an emphasis on the Sufficiency Economy, PM did not mean for Thailand to shy away from the market economy or to change its course of economic development, but rather for the Thai people to wake up and be warned not to put all their eggs in one basket. Lessons learnt from the past are priceless and must not be forgotten. The Thais should pursue a balanced way of doing business. The Deputy Prime Minister and the economic Ministers have been working on the government's economic policy which would provide more details on this issue.

Mega-projects

14. The Government would carry on the mega-projects, as proposed to the international community by the former Prime Minister, on the basis of transparency and justice. At the same time, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance would take a close look into the details of each project. PM underscored the need to upgrade the mass transportation system throughout the country. Thailand has long been dependent on the road system and the import of fuel. Improving the mass transportation

system, including the rail system nationwide, would help decrease such dependency.

Free Trade Agreements

15. PM explained that the Government would take a close look into this issue. He stated that the Government looked forward to carrying on with whatever would be mutually beneficial for Thailand and our friends. However, due to time limitations, the Government might have to devote its attention to the priority of restoration of the country's parliamentary democracy and a national referendum on the new Constitution, instead of dealing with sensitive issues like the FTA.

FM also added that when the time is appropriate to continue, the Government would proceed with the FTA. However, the issue is currently under review by the authorities concerned.

Foreign Policy Continuity

16. In assuring the diplomatic corps/international organizations of foreign policy continuity, PM announced that he would attend several meetings scheduled for this year, including the ASEAN Summit in Cebu which would provide him an opportunity to meet and discuss with the Leaders of ASEAN, China, South Korea, Japan as well as India. In addition, the Government would continue to promote closer relations with Africa as "Partners for Development." For the past two years, interactions between Thailand and Africa had broadened significantly. Thailand is dedicated to keeping the momentum going for the mutual benefit of both sides.

PM also ensured the Heads of International Organizations Offices that they could count on the total support of the Government for their work and activities. Thailand stands ready to work closely with the International Organizations in assisting our neighbours as well as other developing countries and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), especially in the fields of health and agriculture. PM expressed his high hope that the Heads of International Organizations Offices would convey to their headquarters the political developments in Thailand.

FM added that the foreign affairs of the Government would stress continuity. Nonetheless, the conduct of foreign policy under this administration would be based on transparency. Thailand would continue its adherence to the treaties and obligations to which we are party. We

would continue to promote friendly ties with the countries we had long enjoyed cordial relationships. Foreign affairs would be non-partisan, but based on mutual benefit. There would be no abrupt change in foreign policy under this administration.

The United Nations and UN Member States could also rest assured of Thailand's unwavering support for the three pillars of the UN's work, namely development, human rights, and peace and security. Thailand stands committed to the international community in relation to UN reform, UN peacekeeping operations, and attaining the Millennium Development Goals. In short, FM emphasized that Thailand appreciated and looked forward to continuing its cooperation with the United Nations.

Problem in the South

17. PM stated that during his life time, he had never taken any easy job. The current task was no exception. During his tenure as Privy Councillor, PM had opportunities to oversee several projects in the South. From this experience, PM believed in frequent and close communication with the local people as a key to solve the Southern problems. Reaching out to the local people would allow the agencies/officials in charge to learn their real needs and problems. Some problems might need time and resources to be solved. However, PM could at least see the light at the end of the tunnel. He underscored the solution of the Southern problems through peaceful means, not by force.

PM commended the work done by the National Reconciliation Commission under the chairmanship of former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun. He would use the report of the Commission as a guideline for solving the problems in the South.

Return of the former Prime Minister to Thailand

18. Asked about the possible return for former Prime Minister Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, PM explained that he had talked by phone with the former Prime Minister last week. PM suggested his predecessor to stay put for a while until the situation died down. The former Prime Minister requested that his asset before entering politics should not be taken under scrutiny. PM gave his assurance that the Government would deal with this issue in accordance with the rule of law and would ensure justice.

PM stated clearly that the Government would not impose any restriction on the return of the former Prime Minister to Thailand. As a

Thai citizen, the former Prime Minister has every right to return to his home country at anytime. However, appropriate timing would depend on further discussions between PM and his predecessor.
