

Prime Minister's Briefing for Foreign Media on the Current Political Situation in Thailand, Government House, 29 May 2010

On 29 May 2010, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva gave a briefing for international media on the current political situation in Thailand in relation to the protests by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD). Noting that the foreign media had been following very closely the events over the last couple of months and had already received a number of briefings, he made brief comments on three issues, namely: what had taken place and the Government's thinking through the events, the current situation and short-term measures that the Government was taking, and the longer-term future.

On the first issue about the events, Prime Minister Abhisit emphasised three points. Firstly, he reaffirmed that it had always been the Government's policy to seek a peaceful resolution to the problems and to exercise utmost restraint. And in its decision and at every single point the Government was mindful of the need to restore order with minimum losses. From mid-March until mid May, the Prime Minister had been involved in direct negotiations with the protest leaders which was subsequently called off by the latter. In May, he proposed what an overwhelming majority of Thais felt to be a very sensible compromise in the form of the five-point reconciliation plan with early elections held in November. While on the surface the protest leaders had accepted it, a week passed without them calling off the protests. The Government had good reasons to believe that they were not allowed to do so by the former prime minister.

Secondly, the Government's decision and operations were based on what it could do to restore order with minimum losses. It should be recalled that on 10 April 2010, the army's operations to reclaim some areas in the Phan Fah area proceeded for six hours without any loss of life. Losses began to occur once M-79 grenades were launched from armed elements among the protesters. Mindful of the fact that there existed armed people willing to use weapons against officers and innocent people, sometimes indiscriminately, the Government decided not to go to Ratchaprasong to disperse the protesters. Rather, after the reconciliation plan was rejected, the Government decided to cordon off the protest area by setting up check points, which began on 14 May.

In the following few days, the number of losses began to increase. It must be emphasised that all of these losses occurred outside the main protest area of Ratchaprasong. They were incurred during the clashes around the area and at check points, particularly at Din Deang/Ratchaprarob in one direction and the Klong Toei/Bon Kai/Rama IV area in the other. A lot of grenades and weapons used were stored in the areas next to Lumpini Park. These events took place during 14-18 May.

Regarding reports on 18 May that a group of senators and some NGOs wanted to mediate, the Prime Minister recalled that he was contacted by the President

of the Senate and was told that as a gesture of good will, there would be a ceasefire – which was their words – from 18.00 hrs. But this did not materialise as grenades continued to be launched in the evening into the night of 18 May. He was also contacted by NGOs who proposed that if the security officers were to retreat from their check points, all the people that were rallying or engaged in activities in Din Daeng and Klong Toei areas would join those in Ratchaprasong. He found this an impractical and rather counterproductive idea because it would only worsen the situation.

In the early hours of 19 May, what the security officers did was to reclaim the areas next to Lumpini Park – not to go into the Ratchaprasong Intersection. They did that successfully around 10.00-11.00 hrs., although there were still some clashes at Sarasin Intersection until about noon. Then, the protest leaders called off their protests at around 13.00-14.00 hrs. and turned themselves in with the police. Unfortunately, groups of people who had been engaged in violence, decided to set on fire not only the Central World but also some buildings in Siam Square and other areas of Bangkok, the majority of which appeared to be premeditated and well coordinated, not a natural outburst of emotions, although maybe one or two minor incidents might fit into that description.

Tragically, the Prime Minister noted, some shootings took place at Pathumwanaram Temple at around 18.30-19.00 hrs., and that full investigation into what actually took place would be made. He nevertheless pointed out that the military operations had ceased once the protests were called off because the authorities had to be careful in facilitating the protesters to go home and have them move in the direction of the National Stadium. The only movements of troops in the area nearby were the attempts by the officers to make sure that fire engines and volunteers could get into the area as some buildings, including the Central World and some in Siam Square, were still on fire and it was difficult for people to get in to provide assistance because there were still shootings. Apart from this, the military did not do anything that would lead to violence or clashes with the protesters.

The Prime Minister also pointed out that more and more evidence were coming to surface that the theory that people in the temple compound were shot by people from up above the BTS line contradicted the findings of the autopsy released on 29 May, the results of which suggested the shooting took place on level ground – at least for four of the six people who were found dead in the temple ground. Be that as it may, he emphasised that full investigation would still be needed to get into the bottom of the events.

On the second issues about the short term measures, Prime Minister Abhisit said that the state of emergency would still be in place although the curfew would not be extended. In this regard, the night of 28 May was the last when the curfew was in effect in Bangkok and some other provinces. As for the state of emergency, the Government would continue to receive assessments from people on

the ground; provincial governors, local police and military officers in charge of the respective areas would give recommendations on when to lift the state of emergency.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister said that the Government had moved swiftly on providing assistance and compensation for victims of the events, people affected and those who lost their shops. A package of assistance had been approved by the cabinet. Some initiatives had already been taken in terms of providing shopping areas such as by closing off Silom Road. These were short-term measures that the Government would continue to take to stabilise the situation and restore it to normalcy as soon as possible.

On the third issue about the future, Prime Minister Abhisit said that the Government took as its No. 1 priority that it had to follow through with the reconciliation plan. The five-point plan that he had proposed still stood, and the Government wanted to do all it could to embrace and invite all stakeholders to join in this process. Meanwhile the Government would have to allow all the normal mechanisms in the parliamentary democracy and other mechanisms to work.

In this regard, the Prime Minister noted, there would be two things running in parallel. On the one hand, all criminal cases, including charges of terrorism, would continue, and these would apply to people who violated the law – who, he believed, were only a small minority. He stressed that the Government had never said that people who joined the protests were terrorists but believed that they had legitimate grievances which must be addressed through the reconciliation plan. Hence, while these cases proceeded, the Government would do all it could to reach out to them.

Prime Minister Abhisit further said that the Government would be facing a censure debate on 31 June and 1 May. It believed this to be appropriate and thus allowed it by extending the special session of Parliament so that members of the opposition could bring their charges and their side of the story and the Government would be ready to give its response.

At the same time, apart from an independent commission that would be set up to investigate the events, the National Human Rights Commission and the National Anti-Corruption Commission – both of which were independent and constitutional bodies – would in any case be investigating them. This should assure neutral and accurate fact-finding concerning all the events over the last couple of months.

Q&A Session during Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's Briefing on the Current Political Situation for International Media, Government House, 29 May 2010

Q1 (Nirmal Ghosh, Straits Times): Since assuming office you've spoken of reconciliation. Yet one and half years later, we see Thailand even more divided. There's no sign of any reconciliation. It seems as if there is suppression of the elements that you are talking about, part of the Red Shirt movement, the leadership, and so forth. How realistic is this reconciliation plan of yours given this history?

PM: Well, first, I've always talked about reconciliation that is based on the rule of law. Every time that we took an initiative – to reach out, to compromise, to find agreement, to find a deal – we were denied. It doesn't stop us from trying, from putting more efforts into it, but it does suggest that it is not the government's side that has been reluctant to offer a solution that is based on negotiations, a solution that is acceptable to all sides. Unfortunately, it seems that these latest events suggest that a small group of people not only have no desire to compromise, but are actually prepared to use violence to achieve their ends. That's something that my government, and I don't believe any government would allow so we need to restore order. We need to enforce the law. But we are still determined to reach out to people who disagree with us politically, people who feel that they have suffered from injustice, unfairness, disparities; we will continue to reach out.

Secondly, what we hope to do is if we can separate these extremist elements – the people who want to use violence – from the ordinary people who want no part in these kinds of activities, who merely wanted to exercise their political rights – if we can separate these two elements, then we can treat each group in an appropriate manner. The first you deal with the law and the second you try to reach out. And that's what the government intends to do.

Q2 (Peter Janssen, DPA): Just a follow up question: when you first mooted the roadmap, there was some talk on dropping the ban on various politicians who had been excluded from the political process. That talk seems to have ended. And just to follow up on reconciliation: if you want to reach out, you have to talk to somebody. And is it possible that you will consider lifting this ban to get more people in the talks?

PM: Well, the closest we got to a resolution on this was when we had Parliament set up a commission on the points in the Constitution that should be amended and they came up with six articles or provisions that might be amended. And I invited the whips, the government whips, opposition whips, the Senate, representatives of the Government House, and we agreed to table those points for referendum. They agreed. And then about two days later, the opposition called off the deal after the former prime minister expressed his disagreement. So, again, that was the closest we got to dealing with this issue.

The issue of lifting the ban is now inappropriate for us to talk about. We have a case in the Constitutional Court. We don't want to do anything that would be self-serving. So in case we lose the case in the Court, then we'd be accused of trying to lift the ban on ourselves, if we were to lose the case. So I think, you know, this wasn't really a

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demand of the vast majority of people who were in Ratchaprasong. It wasn't one of the points that they brought up. But it may be in the interest of a number of politicians who are interested in this. And I have said in the five point plan that the best thing is for a non-political body or a commission of some kind to look into these matters, and that committee is going to be set up. I've asked a number of academics to join in that committee.

Q3 (Nick Nostitz, Focus Agency): Prime Minister, I have a question about accountability, rules of engagement, and the use of live fire. Now please don't misunderstand me, I don't want to portray the Red Shirts as unarmed. There're more than a few, there's more than a bit of evidence that the so-called "black shirts" were operating. Nevertheless, there were more than a few incidents where the rules of engagement set by the CRES have been clearly broken by the military, such as, for example, on 15 May on Rajaprarop Road, an incident in which I unfortunately was caught up as well and also shot at by soldiers, and a couple of protesters in front of me who were clearly unarmed were shot at for a period of about 15 minutes repeatedly and successively were injured. That's also corroborated by video evidence and also by today's account of The Nation photographer who was also shot at in this incident. Now my question here is about accountability under the Emergency Decree. Will the people who ordered that shooting be made responsible? Also, secondly, my question, further the FCCT's question, about the investigations: given that also a lot of us journalists were injured so we are certainly stakeholders, and given past incidents where we can't really put too much trust on so-called investigations here in Thailand, will also some representative of media organizations have a place on the investigation panel?

PM: First of all, if you would like to be a witness and provide testimony to various investigation committees, I think you're welcome to.

[Nostitz: No problem with that it's already in the public, but yes.]

The rules of engagement and the use of firearms and instructions and policies have been clear: warning shots, self-defence and clear targets where there are weapons involved. If there is violation, then we have to look into them. Just to warn you that before 14 May, we had warned that there were armed elements in the protesters whose targets were not security officers, so you have to be aware of that as well and so we will have to get into the bottom of what actually took place on Rajaprarop Road.

[Nostitz: We have seen at that particular incident there was no fire from the side of the protesters at all. The only fire ...]

They were not always located with the protesters.

[Nostitz: We were there, without warning shots, the army fired straight on the protestor and that is corroborated, proven, video, everything I mean please sir.]

If you have that, please submit to the investigating committee. All I would point out is that we also have a lot of video footage that shows that the way the troops operated, they were very, very careful on the targets and that we also had on Rajaprarop Road a

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number of people on some of the buildings who were not military people who were actually shooting at innocent people and bystanders as well. So you're welcome to provide the testimony and we'll look into the matter. And as far as the investigations are concerned, as I said, the Human Rights Commission will be doing it, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) will be doing it. We'll have an independent commission set up. And so I can reassure you that we'll hear all sides and then we'll take it from there as far as responsibility and accountability are concerned.

Q4 (Ben Doherty, Sydney Morning Herald): Are you still prepared to negotiate over early elections? We had the date of 14 November which has since been withdrawn. As part of that reconciliation roadmap, is that still on the table? And going the other way, you've mentioned that there needs to be peace, I suppose, for an election to be held in this country. Can you guarantee that by the end of next year when your term expires, there will be elections in Thailand?

PM: I haven't ruled out early elections. Obviously it's a lot more difficult now to have elections before the end of the year because the November date was set with the protesters joining the plan right from the start in mind. Because that hasn't happened, it's going to take a while longer to establish the right kind of environment, but I have not ruled out early elections.

[Doherty: And by the end of your term, Prime Minister?]

PM: Well, the elections mean the elections before the end of my term.

Q5 (Simon Montlake, Christian Science Monitor): Prime Minister, recently the emergency committee that you head said that it had uncovered a plot to topple the monarchy. And you yourself made similar references to the fact that the protesters' aim was not simply an election but was something higher. These are very serious allegations in Thailand. Can you explain what evidence you have for this accusation, and how you plan to proceed? And do you also make a differentiation between criticism of the monarchy and those around it and an actual plot to topple the institution which would involve legal and political and very radical changes into the country?

PM: I think we have a number of cases where there is violation of the law concerning security and the monarchy, which is clearly there in print or on the internet – people who openly say that they have an aim to do just that. From there we look at the people who are involved in producing these kinds of materials. So, again, just when I talk about terrorist elements, armed elements, it is a minority of people. We are not saying that the people who are out at Ratchaprasong have this aim. On the contrary, we believe that they are loyal subjects just as a lot of them came to demonstrate to air their grievances. So we're trying to separate these elements out.

And my answer to your second question about whether we separate the comments, discussions, criticisms, from attempts to actually topple the monarchy: yes we do make that difference. And since the end of last year, I've set up a special consultative committee on these cases to make sure that there is that distinction being made.

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Q6 (Grant Peck, AP): *I have a question about freedom of speech. You say you want to separate out the trouble makers from the legitimate dissenters, and I'm not clear why the Prachatai website is still being blocked in that case because they've always shown quite a sense of responsibility and at the same time why hasn't action been taken against NBT the government's own station which every night has, for about a year, had many hate and fear mongering programmes produced by T News and Dr. Chermesak? The second related question is the case of Dr. Suthachai from Chula and his lawyer. If his lawyer is speaking the truth, he's even been denied materials to prepare his classes. Have you looked into his case and can you comment on that please?*

PM: On Khun Suthachai, when I was aware of press reports of the incident, I asked the people in the CRES to look into the matter. I see no reason why he should be denied the right to read his teaching materials. But the facts haven't been substantiated about what exactly is going on. So I've already given instructions on that. Similarly on Prachatai website and other similar websites, my policy has been that websites that have maybe discussion boards and have some problems with some of the posted comments, the whole website should not be closed down. Rather, there should be a way of making sure that there is good administration of whether there are illegal comments being posted. I thought it had been lifted for a while but it obviously got into the same problem again. I'll look into the matter because, I mean, my policy, when I told the ICT Ministry, was very clear on this.

On NBT and other channels and programs, part of the plan that I have is now to invite, and I have already invited, members of the Thai media to discuss as to what kind of, I wouldn't say rules, but what kind of standard practice we should adhere to on all channels. NBT will be included; ASTV will be included; other channels will be included. And we will find an appropriate way of resolving that as part of the reconciliation plan.

Q7 (Haseenah Koyakutty, Freelance journalist): *You've mentioned many times that you have control over the security forces, and yet there doesn't seem to be proper planning for the aftermath of when the army dismantled the Ratchaprasong protest site. And could you comment on the fact that buildings like Central World was torched and yet the police headquarters was just opposite that? Could you elaborate on why some buildings were targeted and some buildings not? And also do you think an apology is in order to the people of Thailand? And secondly, on the cabinet reshuffle, do you think a cabinet reshuffle is in order if you're thinking of having an even-handed approach to say ASTV as well as prachatai.com? With all due respect, some of the members of your cabinet were also involved in the yellow shirt protests. Would you be willing to take action on that as well?*

PM: First of all on the issue of the subsequent events after the protests were called off, I'd just like to point out that although the protests were called off at 13.00-14.00 hrs. – which was the decision of the leaders and then they turned themselves in – we could not move into the area because that would risk further clashes between security officers and the protesters, given that there were armed people in the area. For us the priority was the lives of people, not the buildings. Obviously we did not want those buildings to be destroyed and we tried our best to try to get the fire engines and the

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volunteers to go in, but they had real difficulties because they were being shot at. If we decided to move in, I think there would have been many, many more losses of lives. So we had to retain our position of not moving in to those areas directly.

You mentioned a cabinet reshuffle. Again I have said that after the censure motion, actually they were going to submit a censure motion – was it February or March – and we had agreed among the coalition parties that we would discuss cabinet reshuffle after such a motion. So after Monday, Tuesday, after the motion has been taken, we will be looking at that. People who had taken part in the PAD protests, they're under the same law and we will deal with that situation. The cases are proceeding. The police, I think, are about to submit it to the Attorney-General.

Finally I would reiterate once again that the government regrets the losses of lives, the damages we have seen taking place. As I said, we are in the process of fact-finding and a full investigation, and of course we will take whatever appropriate action to show our responsibility and accountability once those facts are known.

Q8 (Russian government newswire, Novosti): My question is based on the rumour, as was the one I asked you at the FCCT dinner a few months back. There is a rumour that your government has been trying to link up Thaksin Shinawatra and the illegal arms shipment from North Korea that was stopped on an airplane before the New Year. I would like to ask how prominently this link may figure in your case against Dr. Thaksin?

PM: There was a report in the Sri Lankan newspaper that had people speculating about this, but there is no evidence to suggest the link as such.

Q9 (Radio France Internationale): Out of curiosity, what is your favourite news TV channel these days – the one you think is providing the most balanced reporting?

PM: I don't watch much TV. I don't have the time. But I usually surf through channels, so I don't stop at a particular channel. I want to get a balanced report.

Q10 (Anasuya Sanyal, Channel News Asia): Now that former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra has been formally charged by your government for terrorism, have you seen any signs of cooperation from Interpol in bringing him back to justice in Thailand? Or do you think that his alleged crimes are not sufficiently international for that to happen? Also, have you seen any breakthroughs on the part of collaborations between your government and other governments on his extradition? It seems to me that has been, along with reconciliation, the number one priority of your government.

PM: Two steps, you need to have the arrest before the extradition. At the moment, as far as Interpol cooperation is concerned, we are in the process of providing the documents so we have to go through that process first.

Q11 (press agency not specified): I have two questions. The first question is: many people have the impression that Thailand is a symbol of luckiness, peacefulness and beauty, but now when the country experiences this political movement, how do you think the others especially the Chinese tourists will evaluate Thailand? And the

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second question is: if your friends or some relationships or relatives are Red Shirts, will you try to persuade them to give up or change opinion? So what would you want to say to them?

PM: First, I strongly believe that the majority, overwhelming majority, of Thai people, continue to be peaceful and moderate. What has happened over the last couple of months, for me, is uncharacteristic of what the majority of Thai people are. It is unfortunate that a small group of people can cause so much trouble by instigating violence through various means. The day after 19 May, when order was being restored and only a few days after that, you saw the people of Bangkok all coming out to do the big clean up. I think that is more characteristic of what our country, what our people, is about. And it will take some time for the divisions and the wounds to heal, but I am still confident that the majority of Thai people would like to see our country return to peace and stability.

On the second question, as part of the plan, we need to reach out to everybody, and reconciliation will never be achieved unless we can successfully reach out to those people. I don't intend to change their political opinions. I think they are entitled to their political opinions. What I would like to say to them is they are entitled to different opinions and they should have space and channels by which they can express those opinions, but please refrain from anything that could lead to violence and disruptions of normal life. That's what I would say to them, and I would do all I can to reach out and address their grievances. If they're not satisfied, they will have a chance to vote in somebody else at the latest next year.

Q12 (Dan Ten Kate, Bloomberg): You mention, as part of your reconciliation plan, the need to rewrite political rules. And yet as you mentioned previously, now if you take on the constitutional provision that calls for disbanding parties, you'll be accused of benefiting your own party. So since that's one of the crucial aspects that disbanded the last ruling party, will there be a mechanism in place to consider changing that rule and other constitutional amendments, and how will that work if your government itself can't initiate that directly?

PM: As I said, there will be a panel that will look into the issue of the Constitution and related laws, made up of academics, and they will take as a starting point the findings and conclusions of the parliamentary commission that was set up last year. The issue of banned politicians and disbanded parties, I must say during my negotiations with the Red Shirts and while I was coming up with the reconciliation plan, were not high priorities for people who came to demonstrate, not even the Red Shirt leaders. But the people who mediated who were banned politicians obviously were more concerned by these issues. So for me, it is an issue which would be very controversial, very divisive and it needs a neutral panel to seek a way out on this one.

Q13 (Elle Mackaren, Aljazeera English): I know that you said you don't watch television at the moment, but you have spoken about responsible reporting and reining in sections of the Thai media. Are you happy for some sections of the Thai media to continue targeting foreign media and its coverage particularly in light of what's been on television in the foreign press? And do you accept that releasing – you were giving us – a document which says "misperceptions of foreign media regarding the situation

in Thailand" only fuels this vitriol that's currently being levelled at members of the foreign press?

PM: I don't think that there is a general feeling concerning the foreign media in general. I have it just as bad from the local media. So the government feels that everybody is doing his or her job. But if there are groups of people who disagree with reporting, they also have rights to write or maybe complain or maybe try to put their side of the story. But there shouldn't be any kind of targeting of individuals or channels or media, certainly not to take any inappropriate actions against them. And I'm not sure whether you are referring to any particular movement or action which you feel is somehow stopping you from doing your job. If that is the case, please lodge a complaint and I'll look into the matter.

[Mackaren: Not stopping us from reporting, but particularly naming reporters and targeting them and calling on people to go and take action against them.]

PM: There shouldn't be people calling on anybody to take action, particularly unlawful action against anybody. But opinions can be expressed about the work of individuals. I'm not sure whether you have any information on any particular movement, but I have said that everybody's entitled to do his or her job. I mean there are some publications that have refused to publish any letter of mine or actually to interview me for quite a few years now. I don't take any action against that publication, but I may feel that it's unfair.

Q14 (Martin Petty, Reuters): *In most of your recent interviews and in the televised addresses to the nation in the wake of the crackdown at Ratchaprasong, you've repeatedly referred to shadowy terrorists as being responsible for perhaps most of the violence, most of the incidents where people were wounded, or where people were killed, but you haven't actually presented any substantive evidence to suggest this. Despite the vast resources that you have, close circuit television, surveillance from helicopters, there's still nothing being presented. But you continue to use this case here in documents and in TV interviews. Yet there is quite substantive evidence out there, or at least evidence that we've seen, of the disproportionate use of force by the military that hasn't really been exercising the rules of engagement. Are you going to provide any evidence any time soon for these terrorists?*

PM: Well, a number of them have been arrested already.

[Petty: But we haven't seen any evidence, any pictures. We haven't seen any pictures of snipers published. We haven't seen any of this, just ...]

We have a number of people arrested with weapons confiscated, and they are in the process of being prosecuted. That's one thing. So there is clearly evidence on a number of incidents that have taken place. Secondly, for some reason, a lot of people are uncomfortable with this use of the term "terrorism" and "terrorist". This is done according to the definition of terrorist act in the Thai Criminal Code, which is in line with UN guidelines. Particularly these amendments to the Criminal Code were made after 9/11, and I think similar changes and definitions are now adopted by a number of countries.

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[Petty: But the debate isn't about what you're branding these people. It's more: do you have substantive evidence showing the people that non-military personnel were shooting at people? There were more than 85 people who died and 2,000 who were wounded. There are accounts of disproportionate use of force by the military in live fire zones shooting live ammunition when actually the protesters were – albeit breaking the law – lightly armed, were being shoot to kill policy – it seemed from what witnesses are saying, but you haven't presented any evidence of these non-military personnel actually shooting at crowds of people and killing people. Is this available, can you tell us?]

PM: Everyone will have to be brought to account. I was interested you said that a lot of witnesses say. Let me just say that if the security officers were really firing indiscriminately as accused, I'm sure that the numbers of casualties would not be what we see today.

[Petty: It's very high...]

I'm not saying that what you said may not or may have an element of truth. It will have to be investigated. But I think it would be unfair to portray, first of all, that the casualties all occurred because there has been indiscriminate use of firearms. I don't think that that would be the case. If that were the case, the numbers would be far, far different. And I would say and again take note of the fact that the biggest number of casualties took place during 14-19 May when the military did not move in. They were stationed at check points around the area. So it's Rama IV, Rajaprarop, and they were being attacked and those clashes, of course, we have to get to the bottom of the truth about what actually happened. But it would be unfair to portray this, somehow, that the military moved in and began to fire indiscriminately at unarmed people.

Q15 (Xinhua): *Do you view Mr. Thaksin who is behind the Red Shirt movement as an obstacle in the process of reconciliation? And how will you deal with him after you said that your government may revoke his Thai nationality?*

PM: The former prime minister has been a big obstacle to a lot of compromise and plans for reconciliation, and I believe he will continue to be an obstacle. The problem is if the whole country has to give in to his demands, which are personal interests, and would allow him to be above the law, it is not something that this government can accept. What we are trying to do now is to tell his supporters, as even some of you have written, to move beyond the former prime minister. If they have grievances, if they have opinions, if they have stances that they feel that the government should listen to, address, solve their problems, please go ahead and bring them, and we'll see what we can do for them. But don't tie this to the interests of one man. It is time for this country to move beyond that situation.

Q16 (press agency not specified): *Just to follow up on former prime minister Thaksin, he has said in comments since the crackdown that he believed that Red Shirt supporters could move into using guerrilla tactics to continue their struggle. Do you believe that your government currently faces an armed rebellion? And on that note, if so, how sure are you of unity in the security forces after recent events? There have*

been indications that perhaps the police are not entirely on board with central orders. Your thoughts on security force unity, going forward.

PM: I reiterate what I said before which is that I firmly believe that people who want to engage in violence is only a small minority. I don't believe that people who have joined the Red Shirt movement would want to support a movement that is violent and therefore our plan is to, as I said, separate those people from the extremist elements. And because the latter is a small minority, I am confident that we can deal with them.

Q17 (Simon Rodney, freelance journalist): Just to go back to the question of elections and timing of elections, you've made some statements that the country would need to be more stable, or some words along those lines, before elections could take place. But can you elaborate a bit more about what that entails? I mean what are the conditions that are needed for elections? They had elections in the Philippines earlier this month and large swathes of the country are unstable. The election campaigns there have historically been dangerous, so if they went by certain criteria, elections will never happen. So what are the criteria you're looking for?

PM: Elections would, in any case, have to take place the end of next year when the Parliament's term is complete. What I said was that if we were to hold early elections, it would have to serve a purpose. And for almost a year now, I have said that it would serve a purpose if such elections could reconcile differences in a stable and peaceful manner, and that the election results and the implications of the laws governing the elections would be accepted. I don't think it would serve the objective of reconciliation if we had violence during elections, if we didn't allow political parties and politicians to work freely, if after the elections the results are disputed, or if there are court rulings concerning the election results, there are going to be more protests. So the point of having early elections to achieve the objective of reconciliation means that we should try to find an environment where it truly achieves that objective. So if we succeed in inviting and embracing all the stakeholders including the people, the Red Shirts, the opposition party supporters, to our reconciliation programme and over the next few months we see the government, the parliament can continue to function smoothly, then that would be the right kind of environment. That's what we want to see.

Q18 (Simon Montlake, Christian Science Monitor): Just to follow up on my question earlier, you were saying about the plot against the monarchy, that people were openly saying that they have the aim to just do that. I mean people say a lot of things. People write a lot of nonsense on the internet. There's a lot of angry speech out there. I just wonder if you can differentiate, I mean, at what stage does that become an actual plot? And if there is a real plot, what are you doing about it? Have you arrested any of the people involved? Have you discovered any more advanced planning? And just another question, if I could: you've presided over a period of the worst political violence Thailand has seen in many years. During this period, have you thought anytime about resigning to take responsibility for what has happened? And if you've decided not to, could you explain why?

PM: The first question, I think there is, I mean, we could clearly recognise the difference between an individual writing nonsense on the internet and people who

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systematically and repeatedly write certain things. I think that difference can be made, and I don't for the moment suggest that we should be going after anybody who writes randomly or have an occasional outburst on the internet. We're talking about publications, websites that systematically have an objective. The cases have to proceed very carefully because we don't want to politicise the matter. That's why we set up this consultative committee to deal with these cases rather than make everybody feel that in these cases, everybody's going to be prosecuted. And since we have this committee before the protests took place, I think we were able to deal with some of the cases, outstanding cases, sensibly including journalists, works by academics.

It's been a very difficult couple of months to say the least for me personally. I never want to see any loss of lives, but my decision has to be based on what I feel is right for the country. If you've got a group of people who are bent on using violence and death just to achieve a political aim, you should really think hard before giving in. All I wanted to do was to make sure that a government in this country can enforce the law, and I've tried like no other prime ministers or leaders have tried to seek a peaceful solution. When was the last time you saw a prime minister sitting face-to-face with protest leaders for five hours? When was the last time you saw a prime minister, despite the protests from his own supporters, very vocal supporters, offering to cut his term short by a year? I think I've demonstrated every determination and sincerity to try to resolve this peacefully. Every time, I was denied by people who always wanted violence and losses of lives to achieve their aims. That's what it came to. That's why I've decided what I've decided. But, of course, I know that I have to be accountable for what has happened which is why we have allowed this censure motion to take place, which is why investigations will have to be made. And if the findings of investigations suggest that I should take responsibilities, show whatever, make whatever decisions, I will take that appropriate decision. I'm not here, sitting here, for my personal gains. That's never been my aspirations as a politician. And I joined politics at the age of 27 because I wanted democracy to function and I've always stuck by the rules. I've always tried to do all I can within the law and under a parliamentary and democratic system, and I'm determined to represent a majority of Thai people also who feel that we shouldn't be held hostage by a small group of extremists who are prepared to go to any lengths even using violence against ordinary people as well as security officers to achieve their political aim.

30 May 2010