

PM urge protesters to end unlawful rallies and join reconciliation process

During his weekly television programme on 9 May 2010, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva elaborated point-by-point on the reconciliation plan or roadmap, which he proposed on 3 May, including its rationale and the progress made, affirming that regardless of how the political situation may evolve, his Government has already started putting it into action. Regarding the five-point plan, the Prime Minister explained as follows:

First, on working together to protect the monarchical institution from being violated, Prime Minister Abhisit said that, in recent years, there have been certain networks of people conspiring to violate the monarchy. Most Thais cannot accept such action; this issue has become a point of contention in the political conflict. In this regard, while the authorities have to continue to enforce the law, all Thais from all sectors and all political groups should work together proactively, particularly to help inculcate and promote a better understanding about the role of the monarchy among younger generations of Thais as well as, among others, foreigners. Meanwhile, those who know individuals in the afore-mentioned networks should also cooperate with the authorities.

Second, on building an equitable and fair welfare system, Prime Minister Abhisit noted that successive Thai governments have been working to resolve these issues, with the present government implementing such programmes as day-care centres in workplaces, free education, skills training for the unemployed, subsistence allowances for the elderly, allocation of land and income guarantee for farmers. Be that as it may, problems facing the Thai peoples regarding economic disparity and poverty as well as unfair treatment by officials and other feelings of social injustices must be addressed systematically under a national reform process. This, the Prime Minister noted, would take time. At the same time, some among the civil society have already been actively involved. In this regard, on 12-13 May 2010, a committee working on strengthening local communities would meet with representatives of the civil society to exchange views on those issues and present initial recommendations to the Prime Minister. Then on 20 May 2010, an assembly comprising people from various sectors of society would be convened for further discussion.

Although the reform process would take time, Prime Minister Abhisit expected that after 20 May 2010, a decision should be reached regarding the establishment of a special mechanism to carry on the work beyond the term of the present Government. Such a mechanism should comprise people from various backgrounds who are acceptable to all sides, working independently from the Government but supported by the government agencies concerned, including the Budget Bureau, the Ministry of Finance and the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). Prime Minister Abhisit affirmed that all problems and grievances – be they structural issues of poverty, social injustices or marginalisation of certain groups, or problems of debts and income – would have to be addressed so that no one in Thai society would feel that they have been left out or treated unfairly and thus must join rallies to make their demands heard.

Third, on enabling the media to operate freely and constructively, Prime Minister Abhisit observed that in recent years, the media – while working to keep the public informed – has also been used as a tool in political conflict. Given technological

advancement and the expansion of the internet, satellite television and community radios, various types of media have been used to incite hatred and violence. In this context, a reform of the media was crucial, and – in his view – could be undertaken through three approaches. Firstly, a law would be drafted and put to public hearings on how to ensure that the media would no longer be used to incite hatred and violence. Secondly, the existing independent regulatory body, namely, the National Telecommunication Committee, should have a role to play, working in close coordination with media organizations. And thirdly, an independent organisation with representatives from the civil society should be set up to monitor and scrutinise the work of the media.

Importantly, the Prime Minister stressed that this process must lead to a point where the Government could not interfere with the media, while there must be rules guiding the media and preventing it from being misused. In this connection, it cannot be denied that in recent years, the media had played a part in escalating the situation to where it is at present.

Fourth, on establishing an independent fact-finding body on incidents related to the demonstrations, Prime Minister Abhisit said that the Government had already set up a fact-finding committee to look into the various violent incidents – including the ones on 10, 22 and 28 April 2010 and most recently on 7 May 2010. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had also set up a fact-finding committee to examine and scrutinise these incidents. In this regard, it must be agreed by all sides that if they all have confidence in the NHRC, they must render it their full cooperation. But should this process be viewed as insufficient, further discussions must take place on appropriate approaches. The Prime Minister reiterated that the Government and the Armed Forces were confident that they had followed the established steps and standards and stood ready to cooperate with all scrutinisation processes. Moreover, they would not seek amnesty for those responsible in causing violence and losses or committing terrorist acts.

Fifth, on establishing mutually accepted political rules, Prime Minister Abhisit observed that given the fact that politicians represent their constituencies and have their own grievances, the issue of political injustices must therefore be addressed. While he could not say how this would lead to constitutional amendments, he noted that the process must not be limited to politicians, but that the views of the public must also be heard. He also affirmed that the Government and the political party he represents would not amend political rules for their own benefit.

Addressing the concerns expressed by some groups in society about his proposed plan, Prime Minister Abhisit reaffirmed that he had not sought reconciliation with those terrorist elements and those who broke the law, and that his proposed plan did not include amnesty in any criminal cases. The Government's objective, rather, was to arrest and prosecute them in accordance with the law. In this regard, some progress has already been made by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI).

As for his proposal to hold general elections on 14 November 2010, the Prime Minister stated that problems of divisions that exist in society must be addressed through political means and these must proceed in parallel with, but separately from, the legal action. Noting that he had never rejected the option of dissolving the House of

Representatives, the Prime Minister said that this could only take place once the right political and economic conditions have been fulfilled. The Prime Minister said that general elections could only be held when all sides have demonstrated their readiness to join in the reconciliation process by, firstly, ending their illegal rallies and, secondly, working together to enable the Government and Parliament to carry on with their functions and political parties to conduct campaigns on the ground ahead of the elections without obstruction or violence. Once these are achieved, then elections could be held on 14 November 2010. If they are not, then elections could not be held. The Prime Minister reiterated that he crafted the plan himself after having listened to the views of all sides and that he would not entertain any additional conditions from any group and that there would be no further negotiations. He had already met and responded to the concerns of those not in favour of his reconciliation plan, particularly the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), as well as those expressing disappointment with it. In this regard, he assured those doubting his motives that there were no hidden agendas or vested personal interests behind his proposed plan, and that he stood ready to continue dialogue with those with different views. Be that as it may, given recent polls pointing to the support of the majority of the Thai people, the Prime Minister believed that the reconciliation process could move forward.

Regarding the incidents that took place during the night of 7 May, which some believe could lead to the termination of the reconciliation process, Prime Minister Abhisit expressed his regrets for the incidents and said that the most obvious group that did not support the reconciliation plan were those terrorist elements who knew that should the plan proceed, they would become isolated because they could no longer hide behind and use the demonstrators as shields. One such individual was known to be manoeuvring against ending the demonstrations by rallying protest leaders in the provinces to oppose protest leaders receptive to the reconciliation plan. The said individual had also said that he would listen to another person now living overseas who was probably not satisfied with the proposed plan as it contained nothing accommodating his concerns, whether with respect to his court cases or other matters.

Noting the possibility that such terrorist elements could use violence against the protesters or protest leaders, Prime Minister Abhisit urged those protesting in the Ratchaprasong area to end their rallies if they agreed with the reconciliation plan, as this was for their own safety as well as for that of officers discharging their duties and other members of the public. He noted that their proposed date to end the rallies on 15 May 2010 was too late given the imperative of their safety, the impact their rallies have already had on the economy as well as the fact that schools would soon start. Any further delays would only lead to further damages and risks, and the Government may not be able to proceed with the proposed election date of 14 November 2010. The Prime Minister urged the protesters to agree upon a definitive answer by 10 May 2010 so that all sides could work together to bring about reconciliation and so that the law could be enforced to bring those terrorist elements to justice.

Finally, the Prime Minister expressed his appreciation for those who had rendered him support and affirmed that whether the rallies ends or not and when, the authorities have plans and would continue to do their best to resolve the situation. All the agencies concerned were supportive of the reconciliation plan and would perform their

duties. He also reaffirmed his determination to bring the country out of the present crisis and that he stood ready to be accountable for every decision he made.
