

THAI GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS



—◆—
*Like the Royal Barge
Suphannahongse,
Thailand continues
to move forward,
gliding strongly and
smoothly towards its
intended direction.*
—◆—

** Work of Thai traditional art
by the SUPPORT Training
Center at Chitralada Villa
of Dusit Palace*

New Perspective on Democratic Leadership

Thailand is by and large a peaceful, cohesive nation, with good governance and the rule of law playing an increasing role in its modern history. After the political turbulence of the past few years, Thailand is now back in business and its politics is back on track. The Abhisit Vejjajiva administration has enacted policies to restore normalcy, harmony and order and put the nation back on the path of rapid growth.

Thailand is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. As the only Southeast Asian nation to have maintained its independence during the colonial period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Thailand is blessed with a stable monarchical system dating back many centuries. This revered institution lies at the core of Thailand's cultural heritage, and is the linchpin of Thailand's national identity, a source of stability and pride for the Thai people.



After the country became a constitutional monarchy through a peaceful transformation in 1932, sovereign power came to belong to the Thai people, with the King as the Head of State. The administration of the country is carried out by the prime minister and cabinet under a parliamentary system very similar to the British system of constitutional monarchy. While the King is above politics and discharges his role in accordance with the constitution, he has devoted his life to improving the well-being of all Thai people through a number of successful royally initiated projects in areas such as irrigation, farming, drought and flood alleviation, reforestation, crop substitution, alternative energy, public health, distance learning and employment promotion. Through such a role, the Thai monarchy has contributed



to uplifting the livelihood of people throughout the nation, particularly those in rural areas, and complemented development efforts undertaken by the government.

Despite frequent changes in political leadership, over the past decades there has been a remarkable continuity in policy direction, providing a predictable framework for investors and businessmen. Regardless of who holds the position of prime minister, the government of Thailand has always been committed to certain fundamental policy principles: friendly relations





with all its neighbours and a responsible and constructive foreign policy, an open market economy, hospitality toward foreign investors and tourists, sound macro-economic policies with fiscal and monetary prudence and the improvement of the country's infrastructure to increase competitiveness and achieve sustainable development. These policies are underpinned by national political consensus and also by the strength and continuity of the civil service of the nation, which oversees the implementation of policies and execution of laws throughout the country.

The Abhisit Government

After months of unruly protests, the Thai House of Representatives voted on 15 December 2008 to elect Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the Democrat Party, Thailand's 27th prime minister.



He won 235 votes of support from the total of 433 MPs, beating the 198 votes received by the other contender from the Phuea Pandin Party. Mr. Abhisit was formally appointed Prime Minister by a Royal Command on 17 December, and His Cabinet was sworn in and assumed its duties on the 22 December 2008.

The Abhisit government is dedicated to promoting national reconciliation by addressing any domestic issues that may obstruct the development of democracy in order to promote Thailand's traditional social harmony and national unity. One of the Abhisit government's priorities is to make sure that Thailand's politics works for all, through greater democracy, accountability and transparency. Good governance,



respect for human rights and the rule of law, equal treatment and reconciliation with those of opposing views -- these are among the government's main guiding principles.

Prime Minister Abhisit has devoted his professional career to the service of the nation, and for 16 years prior to becoming prime minister, served as a Member of Parliament, representing Thailand's oldest political party, the Democrat Party. At 44 years of age, Prime Minister Abhisit has extensive parliamentary experience, and represents a new generation of Thai leadership. The Prime Minister has gathered around him a number of highly capable and experienced cabinet ministers and advisors to assist in forming creative strategies for meeting the challenges the nation faces. The speed at which the government has moved since December 2008 to devise and implement effective policies has been commended by many observers, both Thai and foreign.

Political Development for Economic Sustainability

The government recognises that democracy must be conducive to economic development if it is to be sustainable. Its commitment to freedom therefore extends to its economic policies, where the need for growth, driven by competition and entrepreneurship, must be balanced by judicious public sector intervention to ensure fairness and to help the least fortunate.



Immediately upon forming a government, a stimulus package was proposed by the cabinet and passed by the Parliament in January 2009, injecting USD 3.3 billion into the economy with the aim of helping those most in need and to cushion the impact of the economic crisis, as well as boosting domestic consumption by putting money directly into the hands of the people. Beneficiaries include farmers, low-income earners, the elderly, parents with school-age children, the unemployed and those at risk of being laid off. As of June 2009, around 70-80 percent of this USD 3.3 billion program has already been disbursed.



Following the success of the first stimulus package, a second and much larger stimulus package of USD 45 billion has been presented to the Parliament, to be spent between fiscal years 2010-2012 – an investment equivalent to some 5 percent of the country’s GDP each year. This second programme – which calls for public investment in major infrastructure projects, designed not only to generate employment and income, but also to enhance Thailand’s competitiveness – provides a strong platform for higher levels of economic growth, and creates investment opportunities for the private sector. The plan to implement the programme, dubbed “Thailand: Investing from Strength to Strength 2012” scheme, was officially launched on 4 September 2009. It spans projects ranging from water distribution, transport, communications, energy and logistics to health care, education and development of the service sector and the creative industries. There will be major opportunities for private investment, both Thai and foreign, in these mega-projects.

Social Order

In addition to the many economic initiatives being undertaken by the government, attention is being paid to political reform and social development. Recognizing diverse political opinions in the society, the government has been continuously making efforts to bridge these differences through democratic means and with due respect for people’s rights and freedoms under the Constitution. It has thus advocated the process of political reform with participation of all interested parties, while maintaining order and enforcing law on the basis of equality and justice for all. Calls for amending the Constitution are being addressed in a cooperative effort through the parliamentary process – an undertaking in which the political opposition is participating and the opinions of the general public as well as experts in constitutional issues is being sought.

With regard to maintenance of public order, laws are enforced on a fair and non-discriminatory



basis. Development and justice are emphasised as a way to end conflict, especially in the South. Justice and the rule of law are recognised as essential for national reconciliation to be achieved and for Thailand to move forward.

Looking Ahead

Under the government of Prime Minister Abhisit, Thailand is back on track after a difficult and turbulent year. The government is committed to reform that will improve equal access to economic opportunity and close the gap between the haves and have-nots. This will be brought about through the parliamentary process, guided by the traditional Thai traits of tolerance, common sense, and preference for peaceful solutions to problems.

