

One month progress report of NCPO

Since the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) assumed control of national administration on 22 May 2014, the main priorities have been to maintain peace and order while initiating comprehensive reforms to move the country towards a fully functioning and sustainable democracy with His Majesty the King as Head of State.

The efforts in transitioning the country towards a full and sustainable democracy will be based on the NCPO's 3-phase Roadmap. The First Phase is to resolve urgent problems, expedite national administration, and prepare for the reform process in Phase 2 by fostering reconciliation and returning happiness to the Thai people. The Second Phase involves implementing a provisional constitution, setting up of a national legislative assembly and a reform council, selection of a prime minister, and drafting a new constitution, all within a timeframe of one year. The Third Phase will be the holding of elections under a full-fledged democratic system. This Roadmap has been the initiative of General Prayut Chan-o-cha, the Head of the NCPO. The operational structure is divided into three work groups – maintaining peace and order, national administration, and reconciliation and reform.

In the past month, the NCPO has been able to implement its stated objectives and matters of urgency. Martial law was invoked so that officials can immediately end violence from political conflict which may affect people's safety and property. Initially it was necessary to impose a curfew so that NCPO can maintain peace and order which may affect normal daily life. The curfew was gradually eased, from shortening the hours from 22.00 - 05.00 hrs. to midnight – 04.00 hrs., followed by the lifting of curfew in major tourist areas and the total lifting of curfew across the country on June 13 after only 24 days of taking over national administration.

The overall situation has improved with no indications of violence. The people were able to return to their normal life and businesses can operate as normal. Nevertheless the NCPO remains prepared, particularly when considering the statistics on seizures of weapons. Before the change in national administration there were 19 cases of war weapons seizures as compared to 51 seizures since the NCPO took. This has included 1,996 illegal firearms, 31,840 rounds of ammunition, and 265 grenades and other explosive devices.

The invitations for the parties involved in the political conflict, both directly and indirectly, to report to the NCPO was in order to create a better understanding of the situation. This was done bearing in mind the repercussions on national security and the political, economic and social dimensions. This initiative has received good cooperation from all sides who have also expressed readiness to fully support the NCPO's work in maintaining peace and order.

A large number of invitations was due to the fact that there were many groups who have been part of this political conflict for many years. Those who were requested to remain with the NCPO were allowed to leave within 7 days. For those with existing arrest warrants, the NCPO has sent them to undergo due judicial process.

The NCPO has carried out national administration through 5 clusters and 1 working group. General Prayut Chan-o-cha has given policy direction for all groups to expedite their mandates in order to effectively solve the national problems which had accumulated over many years as follows.

1. The National Security Cluster is headed by General Thanasak Patimapragorn, Chief of Defense Forces, with General Aksara Kerdphol, Chief of Staff of the Army, as the deputy head. The cluster has been successful in seizing war weapons throughout the country and also in monitoring, investigating and apprehending various armed networks. The NCPO has uncovered networks and supporters of numerous groups linked to political groups and illegal businesses. This has been done through combined operations and effective cooperation between security agencies such as the police, the Office of Narcotics Control Board, the Internal Security Operations Command, and civil society. This has led to the suppression of rampant criminal activities including narcotics networks, illegal gambling dens, and exploiters of protected natural resources. The security cluster has also carried out an integrated approach to solving labour issues for a more effective system. It has also put great efforts in creating a good understanding of the situation within the international community in conjunction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other related agencies, including public, private and the general public

2. The Economic Cluster is headed by Air Chief Marshal Prajin Jantong with General Chatchai Satikalya as the deputy head. The most notable achievement has been the reimbursements to the farmers who participated in the rice pledging scheme for the production year of 2013 and 2014. The Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC) has completed payments to the 838,538 registered farmers amounting to 89,931 million baht. This has been achieved by 17 June, ahead of the 22 June target date, thereby ending all outstanding balances owed to farmers within the scheme. The money would help stimulate domestic consumption and to pay off debt, contributing to national economic growth. The national GDP is expected to increase by 0.2 per cent.

As for the 2014-2015 production season, the NCPO conducted a meeting with representatives of farmers, Thai Rice Mills Association, Thai Rice Exporters Association, and relevant government agencies, to come up with assistance measures.

A conclusion was reached to introduce production cost-cutting measures in place of the rice pledging scheme. Varying among areas, it will help reduce at least 500 baht per paddy field from the current cost of 4,000 baht. This approach has gained support from all sectors including chemical fertilizer, pesticide and rice seed producing and distributing industries, agricultural product producers, and land lessors. The BAAC also helps in providing low-rate interest loans, promoting marketing in order to avoid capitalist monopolization, encouraging the use of organic fertilizers instead of chemical fertilizers, establishing cooperatives and small rice mills nationwide.

Apart from the rice pledging scheme issues, the NCPO are reaching out to the international community, through our Ambassadors and Consuls-General, to clarify the necessity of NCPO's takeover of national administration and way forward as per the Roadmap. Special emphasis is placed on international economic and trade policies – focusing on free trade and safeguarding foreign businesses.

The NCPO has met with business representatives from the U.S., Europe, China and Japan which has raised a better understanding among the international community leading to increasing confidence in Thailand. As evidenced in an economic report of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, the consumer confidence index has increased, the first time in 14 months, from 57.7 to 60.0. Investment in the stock exchange and bond market increased by 8 billion and 9 billion baht respectively.

The Committee on Public Budget Expenditures, headed by Lieutenant General Anantaporn Kanchanarat, was established to monitor and scrutinize large projects valued more than 1 billion baht in order to ensure transparency, cost-efficiency and truly benefits the public. In the past month, 10 projects valued approximately then 150,000 million baht have been scrutinized. These projects include the passenger pre-inspection and screening project and Suvarnabhumi Airport Phase II expansion of the Airports Authority of Thailand, energy saving promotion fund of the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Education's tablet project, and management of lottery sales by the Government Lottery Office.

As for the 2.2 trillion baht fundamental infrastructure development project and 3.5 billion baht water resource management project, the Head of NCPO has ordered a re-examination after assessing the views and inputs received from the meeting between 36 government agencies chaired by General Chatchai Sarikalya. The Head of the NCPO requested all agencies to study the details of a new water management plan without thinking in terms of the 3.5 billion baht budget but according to the need in solving immediate short-term, medium-term and long-term problems. This has to be done in accordance with The Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) and water-related plans of every ministry. Projects that are necessary should be carried out immediately and other projects can be considered in fiscal year 2015.

As for the 2.2 trillion baht fundamental infrastructure development project, the NCPO favours an integrated plan which covers rail, land, water and air transport. Meanwhile, a meeting of the economic cluster has approved an infrastructure plan covering projects to be carried out during 2015-2022 as proposed by the Ministry of Transport. However, the high speed rail project was excluded as it is deemed not urgent and more time is needed to study as well as to consider opinions of the general public.

3. The Law and Legal Procedure Cluster is headed by General Paibool Koomchaya, Assistant Commander in Chief, with Lieutenant General Chatchalerm Chalernsuk as a deputy chief. The cluster is responsible for resolving the legal issues and impacts arising from laws which impede the operation of facilitating the public, maintaining peace and order of the society and reducing conflicts.

In the past month, the cluster has been moving forward in suppressing problems relating to drugs and corruption. With regard to drug problems, the process has been made in an integrated manner in order to avoid duplication of work among relevant agencies. An emphasis was made in cutting the funding of the drug traffickers, with the assistance from the Thai Bankers' Association and other monetary associations.

Recently, the NCPO has ordered the Department of Corrections to move prominent drug trafficking offenders to Khao Bin prison in Ratchaburi Province for stricter security.

On corruption, the NCPO has engaged with the Anti-Money Laundering Office and financial institutions in creating understanding about the implementation of laws relating to anti-money laundering. The NCPO also asked for cooperation in scrutinizing financial transactions to prevent money laundering. Concerning the corruption examination, the NCPO also instructed the Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission to continue working on this matter. At the same time, the NCPO established a committee to inspect rice-related corruption in order to ensure fairness. Any other crimes that has not been brought into the justice system will be dealt with indiscriminately by police, prosecutors and judges.

4. The Social Psychology Cluster is headed by General Narong Pipattanasai with Lieutenant General Surachet Chaiyawong as deputy chief. The cluster is responsible in solving problems that weaken Thai society by initially introducing 'bring back happiness' activities in various forms nationwide to create a good atmosphere.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment has been instructed to urgently suppress and arrest those involved with deforestation in every village and community nationwide. Other measures of urgency includes interception of illegal logging and exporting of prohibited timber, restoration of damaged forests and greater cooperation with all stakeholders in forest conservation.

Recently, after a discussion on the tablet project with 10 agencies from the Ministry of Education, it was agreed to halt the buying of tablets as earmarked under the 2013 budget for grade 7 students in zone 4 in the north and northeastern part of the country. It was also agreed to end all tablet buying in fiscal year 2015 as it is not cost-effective nor suitable. The remaining budget would instead be used to enhance other education activities that provides wider benefits such as Smart Classroom and E-learning, which are computer rooms that all students can share.

5. The Special Affairs Cluster is headed by Police General Adul Saengsingkaew with Lieutenant General Suchart Nhongbua as deputy chief. It is responsible for ensuring that governmental agencies act as the main mechanism in driving the country's development and building confidence for the general public. Aside from integrating works from different relevant agencies and managing various funds that benefit the people — including funds for villages, communities, the promotion of women's role in society, promoting the economy, and development projects — a budget totaling 74 million baht has been requested for the National Office of Buddhism to provide aid to temples and monks affected by earthquakes in the country's northern regions that have been happening since 5 May 2014.

The Office of the Permanent Secretary has been assigned to work together with all sectors to formulate a roadmap for reforming the bureaucratic system via eight main approaches. A hotline, with the number 1111, has also been set up to provide more venues for receiving complaints. These measures are in line with the NCPO's policy to provide relief to the people's problems, address corruption and behaviors that are threatening to national security, and provide a forum for the public to voice their opinions on reforming the country, as well as creating reconciliation.

Under the direct supervision of the NCPO, a working group—led by General Udomdej Sitabutr, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army, as NCPO Secretary-General, and Lieutenant General Chart-udom Tithasiri, as NCPO Deputy Secretary-General—has been assigned to follow up on the progress of the NCPO's undertakings. This includes addressing various concerns from the public, especially those in relation to livelihoods.

Finally, the operation of the work group on the promotion of reconciliation and reform, led by General Surasak Kanchanarat, Ministry of Interior Acting Permanent, can be divided into two parts: 1) the Center for Reconciliation for Reform, led by Lieutenant General Kumpanat Ruddit, and 2) the Working Group on Reform for Returning Happiness to the People. This latter group is tasked with formulating a plan to promote a conciliatory atmosphere. In relation to this, it has continually been gathering data, opinions, and recommendations from people from all sectors with the aim to resolve conflicting issues, promote national unity, and return happiness to the people. The working group has succeeded in establishing Centers for Reconciliation for Reform for all provinces, and has organized a total of 696 reconciliatory activities in all four regions; 130 discussion forums has been held and 150 MOUs has been signed between thought leaders with differing views from different areas.

The working group on the preparation of reform for returning happiness to the people has focused on maintaining national security and keeping peace and order. The group's works, carried out in cooperation with the police, include searching and confiscating illegal items, such as weapons of war, and arresting perpetrators of crimes—deforestation, illegal acquisition of natural resources, human trafficking, gambling, etc. The group also has the responsibility to gather data on possible reform from all sectors. The data will be presented to the Reform Council for consideration and use. For the past one month, 240 pieces of work have been collected and numerous interviews have been held to collect ideas from individual and group experts and other people with the relevant experience from all sectors, as well as other involved and interested parties. The working group has received good cooperation so far from 25 people and is looking to hold 12 more meetings of not more than 50 people each time, starting next week.

The working group on maintaining peace and order—led by Lieutenant General Teerachai Nakvanich, Commander of the First Army Region and Commander of the Peacekeeping Task Force—has been assigned the task of reorganizing the society and purging influential groups. This also includes cracking down on illegal gambling, especially betting related to the World Cup, and arranging in orderly fashion the cues for transport vans, taxis, and motorcycle taxis.

Accordingly, the 1st Division of The King's Guard had been assigned to properly regulate motorcycle taxi cues and to address the unreasonably high fares charged and fees demanded by influential groups.

Similarly, the 2nd Division of The King's Guard is charged with the management of transport van cues, beginning with the relocation of the transport van parking hub from the Victory Monument and the site below the nearby highway to the Makkasan Airport Rail Link station. This is to ensure operational order and reduce traffic problems, as well as to abolish the system whereby 'cue-fees' are demanded.

As for the reorganization and arrangement of taxi cabs, Army District 11 has been assigned to handle to issue. There are already efforts underway to regulate and manage taxi cabs at Suvarnabhumi Airport to prevent problems such as passengers being forced out of the car mid-way, drivers overcharging service fares, fee-demanding by mafias, and other illegal activities.

The Budget for the fiscal year 2015 is central to driving forward the national administration. The NCPO has approved government spending of 2.575 trillion baht for the fiscal year 2015, a 50 billion baht increase from the fiscal year 2014. Income is expected at 2.325 trillion baht, which will lead to a budget deficit of 250 billion baht. The fiscal year 2015 budget for government investment has been set at 450,625 million baht, which is 17.5 percent of the overall budget and a 2.2 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. On 29 July 2014, it is expected that the Head of the NCPO will approve the fiscal year 2015 Budget bill. The key strategy of the bill shall be to put in practice the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy of His Majesty the King and to be in line with the 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan and other model schemes, for further consideration by the legislative body.

Considering various events happening in the Thai society, the NCPO's approaches in driving the country forward have been well-received, especially those relating to reorganizing the society and resolutely combatting crimes. However, these pending issues have been accumulated over many years and will take time to resolve. Some problems will also require cooperation from all sectors. In this regard, the NCPO has classified these works into three categories: urgent, short-term, and long-term, where all works are to be done in parallel. Starting from the third quarter of the fiscal year 2014, funds from the Budget will be used to achieve our objectives and the Budget plan for the next fiscal year will be formulated in accordance with the said Budget plan for continuity. All these are what we, the NCPO, have done in the past one month.

Nonetheless, what the NCPO intends and what it considers most important is to return happiness to the people by working rapidly to reduce the widespread anxiety and distrust, rid our country of corruption, and build public confidence in the justice system. We will also work to address all issues that are affecting the safety of people's life and property; to create jobs and income opportunities for those with low-income; to instill in our people a systematic thought process and knowledge so that they can become strong, disciplined and respect the law and ready to confront global changes. The general public should also prepare themselves to be ready to become a part of the ASEAN community, and the wider international community. Also, with the downward trend of growth of the global economy, we are working to rapidly solve the country's economic problem.

The NCPO is resolute and determined to execute these tasks until we achieve our intended goals for our nation, religions, monarchy and people.
