

**Unofficial Translation of the Transcript (in Thai) of the Remarks given by
H.E. Mr. Maris Sangiampongsa, Minister of Foreign Affairs
at the ‘Meet the Press #1’ event
14 June 2024, Vithes Samosorn, Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Dear Members of the Press,

First of all, my apologies for taking some time to meet with all of you. As the Spokesperson of the MFA just mentioned, my schedule has been quite full, and this gathering has had to be postponed until today.

Today, I would like to speak to all of you (and to share with you) an overview of Thailand’s foreign policy direction according to guidance from Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin.

First of all, I would like to talk about the **urgent revival of Thailand’s image, international confidence in Thailand, and the Thai economy.**

Over the previous years, to nobody’s fault, Thailand’s political instability has had significant effects on Thailand fully taking advantage of opportunities, (leading to) lost time, as well as reaching our true potential. It has also caused distraction for the international community, impacting its interest in Thailand.

Therefore, the first task I would like to accomplish is to restore Thailand’s image, and shift international focus back to Thailand, so that Thailand may have (and enhance) a key role in the international and regional political arenas.

We aim to bring Thailand back **on the world radar screen.**

Our priority is to bring Thailand back into focus in different dimensions, whether business or tourism, which have a profound impact on our economy. The Government of Prime Minister Srettha emphasizes not only economic cooperation, but also cooperation between the private sectors of Thailand and our friends. Our aim is to let the international community know that Thailand is back, as a democratic country that is open for business, and that there is no better time to do business in Thailand than right now. The current Government is highly pro-business, and would like to collaborate with our friends.

Another priority I would like to highlight is the bread-and-butter issue of placing people at the heart of our foreign policy, which is what we call an ‘economic-oriented’ and ‘people-centered’ foreign policy. In fact, I view that in current and future global contexts, public policy and foreign policy must go hand-in-hand. Many public policy issues are correlated to foreign policy, and vice-versa. They must work in tandem towards a win-win scenario, where international cooperation must benefit

the grassroots population of both countries, not just one or another, so that it may help sustain bilateral relations.

When I say our foreign policy is people-centered, I mean that our foreign policy aims to bring economic cooperation that improves the livelihood of the people in both countries. I believe that this will lead to concrete and sustainable relations.

As you may know, Thailand has always relied on external factors, with international trade and investment accounting for close to 70% of Thailand's GDP. Therefore, external factors matter greatly, not only in trade but also in investment, our value chains, our capacity-building and in upskilling our workforce to international standards. In parallel and to this end, we also aim to improve the quality of our education system to accommodate the adaptation of new technologies, such as semiconductors, which the Government fully supports. Therefore, workforce upskilling and education are important bases that will bring prosperity to Thailand.

To this end, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a critical role. Today, we have MFA executives from all departments, as well as our Permanent Secretary, with us who would be happy to chat with you.

Currently, the MFA has almost 100 offices operating worldwide, which is our main network to revitalize Thailand's image. We also have 'Team Thailand' which, in addition to the MFA, comprises other Thai government agencies attached to our Embassies. The work of our agencies is integrated towards the same direction; to attract investment and trade, among others.

I have instructed all MFA personnel to be proactive in reaching out to our counterparts, and not to wait for our counterparts to come to us. Now and moving forward, I would like to see our foreign policy and our diplomatic staff become more proactive in encouraging concrete cooperation.

We also place great emphasis on the private sector. As I always say, the value chain comprises two equally important factors. First is the government sector, which must facilitate the real players, which is the private sector. I have instructed MFA executives that I wish to see the public and the private sectors working as one. The public sector must facilitate, while the private sector must concurrently be proactive in yielding tangible results.

I would like to emphasize that this is not out of reach for Thailand, which has a great deal of potential, be it our strategic location, our connection with ASEAN and ASEAN+ with China, Japan and South Korea; a market of two billion, as well as with BIMSTEC and the South Asian countries; another market of two billion. Thailand's central location is one of our strategic advantages, connecting the North with the South. We are also complemented by our close relations with the South

Pacific countries. So you can see that one of our greatest advantages is our strategic location. Our cooperation would mostly be based on logistical management with Thailand at the center of both production and logistics.

This is in line with Prime Minister Srettha's 'IGNITE Thailand' vision to make Thailand a regional hub in eight areas, namely (1) tourism (2) wellness and medical (3) food (4) aviation (5) logistics (6) future mobility (7) digital economy and (8) finance. Thailand being a strategic hub would not only benefit Thailand itself, but also our neighbors as we become a force for development in our region. In being a hub for development in the aforementioned eight areas, Thailand can drive growth in the region.

In addition to bilateral relations, I would like to see Thailand collaborate with our friends in the international arena and create prosperity for the regional groupings that we belong to. Thailand will show the international community our potential as a valuable player.

Another one of our priorities is increasing market access through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). The Thai Government fully encourages negotiations of FTAs with other countries to boost trade between Thailand and our counterparts. I would also like to see MFA's increased role in giving valuable advice to the private sector, encouraging them to take advantage of our FTAs.

Additionally, I look toward emerging or new markets, such as Africa, Central Asia and Latin America, with whom we would also like to establish FTAs. All these countries and regions have great potential. I myself will focus more on relations with the emerging markets and pave the way for official visits by the Prime Minister to lead to concrete outcomes.

We also have the **Friends from Thailand (FFT) Programme** as a means to increase Thailand's role in other developing countries, improve people-to-people relations and access these new markets.

Tourism is certainly a key industry and a low-hanging fruit for Thailand. The MFA is working with the Ministry of Tourism and Sports to expand our tourism sector. As you can see, the Government has introduced multiple measures to boost tourism in Thailand. These include the Visa-Free schemes for foreigners from over 90 countries and territories, and extending periods of stay from 30 to 60 days. We believe that these measures will succeed in attracting visitors to Thailand, which is of great importance as (in the past) up to 20% of our GDP derives from tourism.

The Government also recently launched the "Six countries, One destination Initiative", under which Thailand will promote tourism along with five nearby

countries in ASEAN to boost our cooperation in tourism. Thailand has played a prominent role in attracting visitors to the region and we would be happy to share our experience in tourism marketing and promotion, which would be useful for our neighbors. All this can help uplift Thailand's tourism-related businesses.

However, some may have security concerns as we open up Thailand to more visitors. Therefore, one of the tasks in the pipeline for the MFA is the Electronic Traveling Authorization, or ETA, system. The system monitors travelers' routes and tourist behavior, which is then analyzed to ensure safety and security.

'Soft Power' is another factor that can be exchanged between our peoples to boost Thailand's popularity. I also view that Soft Power must be a two-way exchange that brings about creativity. Therefore, I would like to elevate and add value to our Soft Power factors, leading to a Creative Economy beyond tourism.

The protection of Thai nationals abroad is the foremost mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this regard, timeliness is of the essence. As we can see in recent months, a crisis may emerge at any moment, be it wars, conflicts or pandemics. Therefore, we at the MFA highly prioritize the care and protection of Thai nationals abroad.

2. Thailand's return to regional and global leadership roles

Meanwhile, Thailand would like to demonstrate our role as a key player in the region. I would like to see our increased role in supporting humanitarian assistance for the benefit of mankind. Apart from our goal to restore Thailand's image after our 'absence' from the international arena, as I mentioned earlier. We would like to have an increased role in the regional and sub-regional groupings, especially ASEAN, of which Thailand is a founding member.

ASEAN remains the Pillar of Thai foreign policy, and Thailand is one of the pillars of ASEAN as well, as one of its founding members. ASEAN began with a conflict of political ideology, and evolved into economic cooperation under the Government of General Chatichai Choonhavan, and now, we have further evolved toward sustainable development. This shows the clear role of Thailand in the ideological foundation of ASEAN, and we have the full intention of moving ahead together with ASEAN as the bloc helps bolster Thailand's capabilities. In terms of economy and trade, ASEAN is also our largest export market.

In terms of regional and global politics, Thailand is in a strong position both in terms of both logistics and location. We are also in a unique position in that we have no enemies, and are friends with all countries. This is one of Thailand's strengths. Therefore, we need to emphasize our role in working with the international community to solve problems both at the regional and global levels.

When it comes to superpower competition, I am confident that Thailand has ample potential, as all superpowers realize that Thailand is friendly to all sides. Therefore, I would like to see Thailand's increased role as a bridge that helps create a peaceful environment, leading to the eventual resolution of issues.

I would also like to see frameworks for cooperation with our neighboring countries develop. Bilaterally, we have good and vibrant cooperation with our friends, but as the Ministry's current foreign policy, we also aim to intensify our cooperation within sub-regional frameworks, for instance, in ACMECS, the Mekong - Lancang Cooperation, BIMSTEC, and RCEP.

RCEP is the world's largest FTA arrangement, with a large population and the largest GDP globally. These regional and sub-regional groupings are of great importance to Thailand.

APEC is the grouping with much potential that can help boost Thailand's standing.

As for **IPEF**, I recently attended the IPEF Ministerial Meeting and had a meeting with (US Commerce) Secretary Raimondo, where I informed her that I can see a clear role for Thailand within this framework. As IPEF focuses on bringing the private sector together, it becomes an important factor that can highlight Thailand's role, and will be very beneficial for Thailand.

Thailand is a founding member of the **Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD)**. We aim to magnify our role with our campaign for the ACD chairmanship next year, which I am confident will help boost our standing in the international political arena.

BRICS is a critical framework for Thailand as it represents a south-south cooperative framework which Thailand has long desired to be a part of. BRICS is made up of developing or Global South countries, but at the same time, they have high potential as emerging economies. If Thailand can cooperate with BRICS members and become a key player, I am confident that we will be able to foster the connection both among the BRICS members and between BRICS and other blocs to which Thailand is a member.

OECD is another organization that Thailand wishes to be a part of, as it will show the international community our true potential and our ability to improve standards and professionalism to the globally-accepted levels. This, in turn, can strengthen our production sector and, at the same time, demonstrate that Thailand is ready to work with the international community in all dimensions.

Within the **UN** framework, Thailand is a small country. So we need friends who will work with us to push forward agendas that would benefit all member-states, especially developing countries.

My focus is also on other important issues, such as Human Rights. As we strive towards goals such as the conclusion of FTAs or our OECD membership, we cannot neglect our Human Rights standards.

The MFA's policies also aim to address new challenges, such as climate change, the development of Artificial Intelligence and achievement of the SDGs, which we strive to have a more prominent role.

3. Frameworks for Cooperation with Neighbouring Countries

Thirdly, we place great emphasis on our neighboring countries with shared borders, and our nearby countries. The close relations between Thailand and our neighboring countries will help boost our capabilities, as they all play a role in Thailand's security and stability. This is, in fact, one of our priorities as we strive toward peace, prosperity and stability with our neighbors, which will serve as a solid foundation for our cooperation.

Our cooperation in tourism, under the Six Countries, One Destination initiative, is another way in which we can work together with our neighbors. The development of a high-speed railway system will lead to seamless connectivity and bolster Thailand's place as a successful logistical center.

Soft Power in relation to our neighbors is also crucial as we share similar values and cultures. Therefore, integrating our creativity with our neighbors, led by Soft Power, can help solidify Thailand's relations and cooperation with our neighbors.

In terms of our cooperation with **Lao PDR**, I see much potential in clean energy, as Lao PDR is known as the Battery of Asia and will benefit from cooperation with us. One of the Government's main policies right now is to develop Thailand's potential in the area of renewable energy. We are ready to cooperate with Laos and neighboring countries in the development of renewable energy, whether wind, solar, or hydroelectric power.

Malaysia is another important neighbor with similar potential to Thailand. To address the security and stability issues, apart from encouraging dialogue, I believe that we need to cooperate with Malaysia in developing Special Economic Zones between the South of Thailand and the North of Malaysia. This would help develop closer ties between our people, as well as boost joint trade and economic development. When the economy is good, animosity will fade away.

When it comes to **Cambodia**, we look forward to enhancing border trade, actually with both Cambodia and Lao PDR. To this end, the MFA is opening a Royal Thai Consulate-General in Siem Reap to facilitate people-to-people connection. We also aim to work together to address the transboundary air pollution problem, and connect

our transportation networks. As I mentioned earlier, we need a joint and systematic logistical management.

With **Myanmar**, the internal political situation and conflict have profound effects on border security. We wish to see peace returned to Myanmar, as it will stabilize the border area and reduce impacts upon Thailand. In addition to the security issue, there are many other issues we must address, including illicit drugs, scam centers and other illegal enterprises.

Therefore, we need to move our cooperation with Myanmar forward, as well as become a key player that supports the peace dialogue and seek a solution to the conflict. We will continue to prioritize and provide humanitarian aid for those impacted by conflict, but which must be agreed upon by all sides. The ultimate goal is the end to the conflict in Myanmar, but as the situation remains fragile, we will proceed gradually and with caution.

In summary, our foreign policy direction is three-pronged. The first is to intensify Thailand's role as a key player and restore our standing in the international community.

The second is economic cooperation. We will boost our cooperation with the private sector, with a focus on tangible results, thus improving the livelihoods of our entire population.

The third is the social dimension. I would like to see closer people-to-people ties between Thailand and our friends.

This concludes my 'Re-ignite Thailand's Foreign Policy' presentation.

I thank you all.

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