

As of 21 May 2014, 12.00hrs

Press Release
on
Briefing to the diplomatic corps
on the declaration of Martial Law in Thailand on 20 May 2014,
Naradhip Auditorium, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Tuesday 20 May 2014, 18.00hrs

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Mr. Manasvi Srisodapol, Acting Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Sek Wannamethee, Director-General of Department of Information and Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, briefed the diplomatic corps attended by Heads of Missions and representatives of diplomatic corps from 57 countries and 7 international organizations. Gist as follows.

Following the announcement of Martial Law in the early morning of Tuesday 20 May 2014, at 14.00hrs on the same day General Prayut Chan-O-Cha, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army, briefed a gathering of senior civil servants, representatives from independent organizations stated in the Constitution, and representatives from all professions including social sectors with offices located in central Thailand, on the rationale behind the declaration of Martial Law in Thailand and the establishment of the Peace and Order Maintaining Command (POMC), as well as its expected duration and implications.

General Prayut cited three main reasons for invoking Martial Law. First is to prevent further violence. Second is to maintain peace and order so that all government agencies and the general public can resume their normal activities. Third is to safeguard lives and properties.

The Commander-in-Chief has not given a specific timeframe for the duration of Martial Law, but he assured the meeting that the Law will be revoked ASAP upon restoration of peace and order. It will certainly not be invoked for longer than necessary, and it will not be used beyond the bounds of the Constitution. He further emphasized that although there are many provisions specified by the Martial Law Act B.E.2457 (1914), the POMC has chosen to apply only a few provisions necessary to maintain peace and order so as to minimize restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedom of expressions. This intention is reflected in the issuance of the POMC's Orders so far -- one of them is aimed at restricting the protesters to their specific sites so that their movements do not interrupt normal public life. Furthermore, the Commander-in-Chief confirmed that the caretaker government continues to function fully, although the Centre for Maintaining Peace and Order (CMPO) is supplanted by the establishment of the POMC.

The diplomatic corps took note of the briefing by Acting Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs and asked further questions regarding the safety of foreigners in the current situation, the future prospect of continued economic activities in Thailand, possible restrictions on the movement of persons within the country and transits through airports, as well as the prospects of holding the next general elections. Representatives of the United Nation's offices in Thailand also raised their concern about blocked access to the UN ESCAP premises.

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On the safety of foreigners and future economic prospect of the country, Acting Permanent Secretary assured the diplomatic corps, once again, of the underlying intention to invoke Martial Law, which is to ensure public security that in turn will allow daily economic and social activities, including tourism, to continue unimpeded. To ensure a continued and smooth operation of productive economic activities, the Commander-in-Chief has specifically asked employees of public enterprises, some of whom have joined the protesters, to provide their public services without fail.

On the prospects of the general elections, Acting Permanent Secretary conveyed the Commander-in-Chief's underlying intention to relieve all parties concerned of undue pressure from one protesting side or another in their quest to find ways out of the current political impasse within the confines of the Constitution. On this point, Acting Permanent Secretary added that the caretaker government continues to function and to undertake its responsibilities, and that it is the Commander-in-Chief's wishes to provide a conducive environment for on-going consultations among concerned parties.

Acting Permanent Secretary also assured representatives of international organizations that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has conveyed the matter about the blocked access to the UN ESCAP compound for the Royal Thai Army's consideration. It is hoped that the protesters could be persuaded to provide due access soon.

After the briefing was concluded, a press conference was held by the Director-General of the Department of Information, where the key points of the briefing, as outlined above, were presented to domestic and foreign media.

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