



## Press Release

### **THAILAND: Critical state for Abhisit's government**

The new Thai Prime Minister Abhisit is certainly right about one thing: In line with national interests, the majority of the Thai population wants less conflict and more harmony between the political rivals. Daily demonstrations, occupation of the government and parliament, gunshots on as well as from the demonstrating masses and finally the week-long closure of the Suvarnabhumi International Airport with hundreds of thousands of tourists being held "hostage" by some unsuspecting, but also some grossly insurgent airport occupants brought the country into crisis: The international confidence in the security of the country disappeared, not least because the police and military more or less showed solidarity with the extra-parliamentary masses. The tourists kept away, foreign investments were channelled out to other countries. And now the country faces an additional economic and liquidity crisis.

All this happened for a single cause: to permanently cut off the Ex-Prime Minister, Thaksin from politics and thus, decimate his party. This occurred at the backdrop of his party regaining a clear majority in the first free elections after being thrown out of office by a military coup in 2006. The whole objective was realised when the courts also joined hands with the opposition, military and the police and expelled MPs for at least dubious reasons leading to the complete dissolution of Thaksin's party and weakening of its supporters.

Of course, the Ex-Prime Minister, Thaksin was also not reserved in dealing with his political opponents. He also suppressed his opposition by various means and putting in a lot of money. At the same time, he and his friends became richer. Many accuse him of being too greedy for money and ultimately, gaining even more power as quickly as possible.

However, the new government has to question itself whether this kind of political change and transition of power ultimately proves to be right or harmful for the country.

The new Prime Minister Abhisit, a perfectly likable and eloquent politician with good relations to the international economy, is doing everything to pacify the world's outlook, his own people and the investors in the country through his forceful but charming appeal. He travels throughout the world, from Davos in the U.S. to Japan, invites foreign business representatives to meetings and joint dinner discussions and hardly misses out on any place in the country, where there is a need to impress the investors.

Yet, he has it hard to gain full credibility. Despite of having ministers, who were themselves, insurgents occupying the airport, in his cabinet, there is visible lack of discernible effort to hold the manipulators in the background responsible for those for the terrible events. They neither face serious financial nor criminal consequences.

It seems to be almost suspiciously amusing, if the occupation of the airport is threatened by a new law with fines ranging from 500.00 to 10,000.00 THB (10.00 - 200.00 EUR). In

constitutional countries, and as such Thailand should be seen and judged, deprivation of liberty, breach of the country's peace and coercion of the government bodies can lead to a punishment of up to 15 years.

Abhisit can quickly become a trustworthy person, if he consistently acts against the perpetrators of these crimes. But it remains unclear whether he would ever succeed in this, even if he wanted. Does he possibly owe his power to just these violators of the law in the background and acts as their "puppet on a string" in precisely the same way as his predecessors in the previous governments owed to Thaksin?

It is also unclear as to what power of enforcement Abhisit possesses with respect to his political will. His answers to the questions of European business representatives, whom he invited for lunch on 23/02/2009, were not firm. If the questions had been submitted days before the event in writing, he nevertheless answered them often with a reference to the current legal situation, which prevented him from the elimination drawbacks or provisions unfavourable to the economy. Just the will to amend these laws was not expressed sufficiently strong to convince the foreign representatives!

Thus, demonstrations continued to take place in Thailand. Now there are tens of thousands of red-clad Thaksin supporters replacing the yellow shirts in the daily street scene. They will not cause the same chaos, because firstly, this is not their political objective and, secondly, even the military and police forces will not allow this side of the political scene organizing anything similar to it.

Thus, the country remains divided, the government weak, investors and tourists are sceptical and the economic forecasts are revised weekly to new lower levels.

The country is still left with the hope that Abhisit or even new elections create the basis for a government of national unity. We share this hope and wish! Thailand and its people do not deserve the downturn from the position of an economic forerunner in ASEAN to no man's land due to the vested self-driven motives of a few politicians, as was the case in the Philippines.

(Penguin)