

## **COLUMN: Uncompromising Victories are the Menacing Battles of Tomorrow**

Bangkok (PI) One loser in the recent unrest in Thailand is without doubt: at the crucial moment ex-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra proved to be too impatient and too quick-tongued once again!

*"Quick-tongued" Thaksin loses influence*

His "redshirt" supporters initially enjoyed some sympathy of both a road section of the population as well as foreign observers. They were of course members of the party, who were thrown out of office because of the illegal occupation of the airport, lawless demonstrations and questionable court rulings. The fact that at first they struck back with peaceful demonstrations and then with a coup which blew up the ASEAN Summit, still led to some random appreciation and was at least tolerated as a "just cause" if only by the faithful "redshirt" supporters.

However, they slid to the losing side when their leader Thaksin Shinawatra mobilised his party and called for a "revolution" to violently overthrow the system. As a consequence, the roads were set ablaze and the red-clad mob lost all inhibitions. By the time Thaksin realized his mistake and attempted to apply the brakes, it was too late: the military put an end to the horrific episode, the leaders of the "redshirts" surrendered and bowed down to the authorities. And so any chance of Thaksin holding the reins of the leadership of the opposition is likely to now be impossible, or at least for some time to come.

*Prime Minister appeared "remote controlled"*

Likewise, if one takes a closer look, even Prime Minister Abhisit must be counted amongst the losers. Despite his initial presence as an "embodiment of hope" and attempting to be "unifier of the people", it turned out to be that, neither as an individual nor together with his party, was he much more than a figurehead of his "yellow-shirts" party that previously toppled the old government of the "redshirts" by breach of law and by force. Abhisit has failed or refused to take the opposition seat and to extend a cooperating hand. Rather, he has made it clear that it is not the same when two do the same thing: from the outset he subdued the "redshirts" with threats of state powers coming down hard should they attempt to use the same means that had brought him to power. He also missed an opportunity to warn radicals in all political circles by not bringing the airport insurgents to justice and meting out a real punishment. But then perhaps Abhisit could not have carried all this out anyway. His performances are remarkably emotionless and "remote-controlled"; probably a sign that he never was and continues not to be the master of his own political faith was. So in the course of just a few months, he mutated from an

"embodiment of hope" to the loser of the ASEAN Summit and the fugitive from the indignant masses.

### *A Pyrrhic victory for the "yellow shirts"*

But even for the "old elites in yellow shirts", this was just a Pyrrhic victory. The world knows now that the majority of the wealth of the elites has been built on the lasting poverty of large parts of the population, who are no longer prepared to tolerate it. Thus, the elite are disenchanted as to what will lead to their long term redemption.

However, until then the country will have to collectively pay for the lack of ability to maintain social reconciliation. Since the military coup of 2006, the fading of the Thai attraction for investors continues and increasingly resembles the fatal crash of the Philippines from a leading power to a mere supporting role in Southeast Asia.

### *Military reacted appropriate*

However, this commentator sees in all this a winner, one who did not actually wish to win at all: the military and its leaders countered the violence proportionately and with prudent tactics. They did not tear themselves apart in this confrontation, but acted in strict accordance with their orders when violence built up. The fact that international observers and the press were able to raise hardly a single accusation that their actions were inappropriate, excessive or even "brutal" was a testament to the wisdom of leadership, but perhaps also to the fact that this kind of approach was the "lowest common denominator", to which the various divisions among the security forces were able to agree.

### *Time for new leaders*

One wishes that such wisdom or at least a single common denominator is adopted as permanent policy. Those who continue to wish for total victory against the "redshirts" after all that has happened forget that uncompromising victories already carry the menacing battles of tomorrow within themselves.

It is time that new political leaders come to the fore who can form policies encompassing both "yellow-shirts" and "redshirts", and who would put the country back on track to unity and success. Recent American history has once again shown that it is never too late for such "new faces". (Penguin)