

PM proposes five-point roadmap for reconciliation towards elections by year-end

On 3 May 2010 at 21.15 hrs., Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva gave a live televised address to propose a five-point reconciliation roadmap for resolving the current political situation.

Recalling his two-pronged approach of addressing both the security and political situation, the Prime Minister noted that progress has been made on the security side, including on-going investigations into cases related to terrorist acts and the seizure of war weapons, and that efforts in this regard as well as work on the legal side in pursuing criminal charges against perpetrators must continue. As for the political side, he felt that the timing was now conducive for him to inform the public of how the Government intends to proceed in resolving the political conflict.

The Prime Minister noted that the reasons for the on-going political situation are manifold, with problems of political, economic, social, legal and other aspects accumulating over the years, leading to divisions and escalating tensions. To address these issues, he proposed a **process of national reconciliation**. Based on the views and grievances from all groups of people, be they the protesters, academics, civil society organizations or ordinary people, the proposed process comprises five key points or elements, which, with public cooperation, would enable peace and normalcy to be restored to Thai society.

First, to uphold the monarchy. While Thailand is fortunate to have the monarchical institution as a unifying force among the people, the Prime Minister said that in recent years, certain individuals have drawn the monarchy into the political conflict. In this regard, for Thai society to return to normalcy, every Thai has the duty to protect the monarchy from being drawn into the present conflict, and to work together to uphold and promote a correct understanding about the institution, given the contributions which His Majesty the King and other members of the Royal Family have made to the nation. He also called on the public to help prevent any media from violating the revered institution.

Second, to resolve fundamental problems of social injustice. The Prime Minister highlighted the need for reform at the national level. Although the current conflict may be regarded as a political one, it is in fact based on injustices that exist in society and its economic system. There are grievances of different degrees among those joining the demonstrations, as well as among those not protesting, who may feel that they have been unjustly done by, marginalised, lacked opportunities or even harassed by those in positions of authority. These, he noted, are major problems which – if left unattended – could lead to broader conflict, politically and socially. In this regard, Prime Minister Abhisit called on the public not to allow these problems to be addressed in the same manner as in the past whereby each government would

pursued its own policies aimed at resolving outstanding problems in an ad-hoc manner, which could not lead to justice systematically and structurally. It is high time that all Thai people are taken care of through a reasonable welfare system, with equal opportunities with regard to education, health care and employment, and with income security. Those with particular grievances, such as those without land to make a living, overwhelmed by debt or facing serious difficulties in one way or another, should receive systematic care. In this connection, the process of reconciliation or national reform would draw all sectors of society together to help resolve these problems by coming up with concrete and synchronised measures and clear and assessable targets of raising income levels and creating opportunities for the people. This process, Prime Minister Abhisit emphasised, is what all governments must undertake.

Third, to ensure that the media operate constructively. The Prime Minister noted that in today's information society, the right to freedom of expression and information must be respected. Nevertheless, with technological advances, the media – be they the internet, satellite television, cable television or community radios – have at times been used as political tools by exploiting legal loopholes. Even state television channels have been criticised as playing a part in the conflict. In this connection, Prime Minister Abhisit proposed that in the reconciliation process, the media must have freedom, but that such freedoms should be regulated by an independent mechanism in order to ensure that they are not misused to create conflict and hatred, thereby leading to violence. He believed that if the media could operate in a constructive manner, then Thai society would be able to overcome conflict and return swiftly to normalcy and harmony.

Fourth, to establish facts about violent incidents. The Prime Minister noted that since the demonstrations began in March, a number of incidents have occurred, causing losses and suspicions which could deepen the division and hatred. He stressed that every incident which has caused apprehension among the public must be investigated in order to establish the facts surrounding them. In this regard, the Prime Minister proposed that an independent fact-finding committee be set up to ensure justice for all concerned in these incidents and to seek out the truth for society. For peace to prevail, the society must live together on the basis of the truth.

Fifth, to establish mutually acceptable political rules. The Prime Minister noted that in a democratic system, politicians must represent the people. The political conflict over the past 4-5 years has created the feeling of injustice in many aspects, including the rules, such as the Constitution, certain laws and the deprivation of certain rights of politicians. It is therefore high time to put all these issues on the table and set up a mechanism to solicit views from all sides to bring about justice for those involved in the political conflict, so that they would no longer lead to rejection of the political process and conflict in the future.

With everyone working together on the afore-mentioned five elements, and with the Government, Parliament and civil society able to perform their duties

unimpeded, without anyone attempting to create division or disturbances or violence, Prime Minister Abhisit expressed his confidence that in no time, Thai society would be able to restore harmony and normalcy. In such a case, the Government would be ready to hold fresh elections so that the Thai people can make their political decision once again. He believed that if the reconciliation process begins and peace is restored from today onwards, elections could be held on 14 November 2010. This is the target that the Government is ready to work on. However, should the disturbances persist, the Government would still be committed to his five-point roadmap, although the process could be delayed and a clear election timeframe not able to be determined.

Before closing, Prime Minister Abhisit addressed the demonstrators and those who oppose them.

To demonstrators of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), he affirmed that their demands have been fully taken into account although he would not be able to accommodate their call for dissolution of the House of Representatives, either immediately, within 15 days or within 30 days. More important to demonstrators with genuine grievances, he believed, his proposal would address their problems in a systematic and sustainable way, and although it may not fully satisfy them, it would be the beginning leading to the eventual resolution of their grievances.

To those against the protests and supporting the Government, the Prime Minister said that although they may not agree with the dissolution of the House or the shortening of the Government's tenure by about one year, his proposal was based on the principle of the rule of law, aimed at preserving the democratic system with a constitutional monarchy, which he believed would provide a lasting political solution.

Noting that, as is its nature, such a proposal for reconciliation may not fully satisfy anybody and that it required flexibility and sacrifice from all sides, Prime Minister Abhisit expressed his sincere belief that – based upon his consultations with various group – this was the best solution for the country. In this regard, he hoped that his proposed roadmap would be accepted by all sides.
