

Government Steps up Security in Bangkok

Despite news reports about the possibility that certain groups of people may seek to instigate disturbances ahead of the much-anticipated court ruling on a major case against former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra on 26 February 2010, life and businesses in Thailand, including in Bangkok and other popular tourist destinations, continue as usual.

The Government has made clear that it will do its utmost in ensuring that any incident that may be instigated will not unduly affect the public nor obstruct the every day work of the Government.

In this regard, the Government has instructed security agencies concerned to step up security measures and surveillance to ensure public safety and prevent any disruption. The police would take primary responsibility in maintaining law and order, with the military and civilian volunteers providing support. Among other things, the authorities have set up checkpoints and organised additional police patrols in certain districts of inner Bangkok. Security has been tightened at a number of government buildings in Bangkok and other provinces, and courthouses.

To ensure that timely action can be taken if and when necessary, the Government has also set up a Situation Monitoring Committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban and comprising high-level representatives from civilian, military and police agencies. This inter-agency committee is tasked with monitoring, verifying and assessing situations which may affect public order or national security; ensuring coordination among agencies concerned with regard to planning, making preparations for, preventing and resolving such situations; and making recommendations regarding additional measures and *modi operandi* for the maintenance of security and order for the Prime Minister's consideration.

It should be emphasised that the security measures now in place should not cause undue inconveniences to the public, including foreign visitors. Nor would they prevent people from exercising their constitutional rights to hold peaceful demonstrations. The Government has also reiterated that force would not be used against demonstrators, and clear instructions have been given for security officers to be equipped with only riot gear without any firearms and follow internationally-accepted crowd control measures.

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