

Clarification of Coup by Emeritus Professor Chetana Nagavajara

Dear Friends,

You may have received news in the Western press concerning the coup d'etat in Thailand that took place on Thursday, 22 May, at around 4.30 p.m.. Perhaps an insider's view may help to clarify certain issues that are not easily comprehensible to outsiders.

Demonstrations against the government started about 6 months ago. The original target was the passage of an amnesty law that would exculpate former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, his successor and his gang of all criminal charges, including court verdicts already made. On several occasions, crowds of millions took to the streets demanding the resignation of the government.

Harassments usually take the form of armed attacks of limited scale, and during the past 6 months, 23 people have been killed and over 800 have been wounded, some seriously. Not a single arrest has been made by the police.

During the past few weeks huge illicit arms caches have been found by the military, particularly in Bangkok, and it has been proved beyond any doubt that a plan for a massacre of the demonstrators was afoot. This past week, the Commander in Chief of the army volunteered his services as the negotiator between the opposing political factions. One solution proposed was for the acting government to resign in order to make way for a neutral government to step in to carry out reforms, especially of the election law so as to prevent vote buying and rigging. The acting government would not budge. A coup d'etat was the last thing people wanted, and the military did not want it either. With an imminent mass murder or, worse still, a civil war, the military had to act. People like myself personally have opposed coups d'etat all along, but this time have had to stomach it as a measure to prevent loss of lives.

A civilian government will be installed soon, and the months ahead will be a fraught with all kinds of difficulties, economic as well as political. The new government's first task will be to pay back the government's debt owed to the rice farmers; its magnitude is astronomical, as the previous government has embezzled about two-thirds of the budget. To keep law and order and to prevent violence, it will have to rely on the military. On the diplomatic front, most of the Western countries will be reluctant to cooperate with an "appointed" government.

Parliamentary democracy in the Western sense is being suspended for a while as a matter of expediency, and in the eyes of our Western friends, this is a crime. We need time to put our house in order and to survive the legacy of 10 years of malicious and cunning corruption.

Do not condemn us, but do please pray for us.

Yours

Chetana

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