



## Thailand's self-proclaimed leaders grasp at straws *A SEAPSNet News analysis*

Some six weeks after what was deemed a "successful" coup to rescue Thailand from apparent ruin at then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's hands, the coup-makers are finding themselves in the hot seat of having to justify themselves.

On Nov. 1, about 200 protesters gathered at Sanam Luang (Royal Square) in Bangkok to oppose the Council for National Security (CNS). The protestors threatened "a mass rally to purge the dictators at Sanam Luang" if democracy was not immediately restored. CNS chairman Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratkalin reportedly said that the council would ignore the "antics" of the rally.

The CNS' headache looks set to worsen as pro-Thaksin groups head for Bangkok. Defense Minister Boonrawd Somtas told the media that protestors "from the northern and northeastern regions would arrive in Bangkok [on Nov. 2], but said he was uncertain if there would be political demonstrations." The military strategy as advised by the CNS was to "talk with the opposition forces and convince them to abandon plans to gather in Bangkok."

Incidentally, the taxi-driver who rammed his cab into a wall some weeks back to protest the coup has taken it a step further. He hung himself off a bridge and is deemed by his wife as a hero true to his political views. The coup leaders and interim government are handling the case carefully to avoid more public outrage.

Leaders of three political parties have now also urged the coup-makers "to try to meet the people's aspirations instead of tackling day-to-day problems." The acting head of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party, Chaturon Chaisang, stated that "the coup leaders should not allow themselves to get distracted by minor issues but focus on what they set out to do [as] the restoration of democracy will take time."

While Pracharaj Party leader Snoh Thienthong felt that "military intervention was inevitable in order to repair political flaws and heal social divisions," he warned, "The CNS should try to deliver tangible results as proof that usurping power was not a setback for democracy as... the people want action and not daily excuses." He also cautioned against any greed for power and overstaying its welcome, reminding "military heads to stay out of politics, saying their alleged involvement in forming a new political party might destroy the CNS." Chat Thai Party leader Banharn Silapa-archa also commented that "military leaders should not get involved in a puppet party and politicians should not bait the armed forces as a short-cut to gaining power."

What can the CNS and interim government do to raise support? They have already made tactical moves of reshuffling manpower to sideline Thaksin supporters, while Gen. Sonthi has insinuated that "some individuals close to ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra were behind the mysterious disappearance of Muslim lawyer Somchai Neelaphaijit," the *Bangkok Post* reported.

With Thaksin's wife, Pojaman Shinawatra, working cleverly to ease her husband's path into the Thai ruling society; leadership of the Thai Rak Thai party in the hands of a Thaksin ally; difficulties in finding proof of corruption, and the Pojaman land deal certified legal by the Bank of Thailand; and the people's mobilizing support for the former regime; it would seem that the director of the Institute of Security and International Studies at Chulalongkorn University Thitinan Pondhisurak's prediction will be proved right: "Thaksin's return appears not a matter of if, but when."

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