

THAILAND: Political Unrest and Instability... Amidst a Miracle

Greetings From Bangkok, Thailand, in Jesus Matchless Name;

Briefly, I have just spent the last two months here in Thailand's Nakhon Panom province, in the far-away Northeastern (or Isan) Region, bordering the Mekong River and Laos. While there, I worked alongside my co-worker Pastor Pitak on the final review process of the Isan New Testament, a necessary step before printing. We made good progress reviewing and editing the text where needed, despite having to overcome a few time-consuming obstacles. I fly home tomorrow, Wednesday, December 18th, arriving home in time to celebrate Christmas with Cheryl and our two youngest children and families.

I sense the need to make you more aware of some of the changes taking place here in Thailand. You have likely heard about Thailand's present unstable political situation. (*We as missionaries are safe, to this point, but anything can happen.*) Thailand is most certainly a land of rapid economic advancement, contrasted by slower social change. Presently, Thailand is experiencing previously unheard of political upheaval, fueled by increasing dissatisfaction and diversity of political thought – which has spawned a plethora of various political parties, of which many arise and desist with every election.

Political turmoil is certainly nothing new to peace-loving Thailand – the “land of smiles” on the surface, yet with growing feelings of unrest and a yearning for political and social equality just under the surface. This process formally began many decades ago, in 1932, when the then King of Siam – under pressure by growing factions – agreed to declare Thailand (*then called Siam*) a nation overseen by a Monarchy as a figurative head, yet undergirded with a constitutionally-guided, parliamentary form of elected representative government... not entirely unlike that of Britain.

This arrangement, as it exists in Thailand, has advantages and disadvantages. It has advanced the pocketbooks of the “haves” while decreasing the opportunities of the “have-nots.” This tendency towards cronyism, corruption, and personal gain is prevalent among elected representatives, over the good of the country and the people they are supposed to represent. This is even prevalent among unelected government officials, who advance themselves economically by “buying” their way up the ladders of advancement and personal authority, which puts them in much-better positions to advance themselves both socially and financially.

When an administration gets bad enough, power-hungry military generals have seen fit to step in and declare rule by military coup d'état, supposedly for the good of the country, but often for their own personal gain – typically with little or no bloodshed. A puppet regime is then installed, which lasts until citizen unrest increases to the point where another free election is held. Thus, the whole circulatory process begins again. As democracy has become stronger here over the years, military coups have become increasingly scarce, due to the growth in understanding of the general populace, from a class-based subservient attitude, to an understanding of Democratic voting bloc power.

This voting power is especially true among the rural peasant-farmer populace of Thailand's Northern and Northeastern (Isan) regions, since they comprise the largest voting bloc here. This combined rural peasant farmer populace, has proved practically unstoppable during elections. This was the reason why their hero, Prime Minister Taksin Chinnawat, a former successful Northern Thai businessman, was deposed by a military coup after two land-slide elections, essentially because the opposition parties yearned to regain power, which they could not do during normal elections. Presently in exile, former PM Taksin's future in Thailand has raised emotions and precipitated this present situation. It started because the present pro-Taksin government talked of passing a law to absolve all charges against him, most of which were politically-motivated unprovable allegations.

With all these various things in mind, one can readily understand why the general populace is fed-up with the whole corrupt political process. As a result, they have now split into an assortment of mob demonstrators, each group demanding to be heard by the powers that be. Yet, even these “mobs” – as the Thai media call them – are not in agreement. Two general factions have emerged, the one demanding reform before any further elections are held, the other calling for new elections previous to any reform takes place. Both have their pros and cons, but neither seem fully workable as it stands.

One of the more hot-headed but less-informed leaders, who has gained a small but emotional following, says they will storm the American embassy. Hopefully, cooler minds of reason will prevail as the US has always stood alongside Thailand. This is only one of the various factions, none of whom seem to be able to join in agreement concerning a viable course of action. Meanwhile, the present pro-Taksin administration and the opposition have dissolved, leaving a care-taker government in place until further elections can take place, which are scheduled for February 2, 2014.

You can see the reasons for the groundswell of polarized emotion that has developed. Things could potentially get much worse before they get better. To add to that dilemma, the beloved King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej (*PooMePone AduneYaDet*) is now 84 years of age and is presently suffering from poor health. Having reigned since 1946, it remains very uncertain as to how long His Majesty will remain a stabilizing force for *internal* peace in the “*Land of (external) Smiles.*” **Please pray** for social and political stability for Thailand, as well as a new awareness of the *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*, the Lord Jesus Christ.

GOOD NEWS CONCERNING SOCIAL CHANGE IN THAILAND: A miracle is now taking place here in this Buddhist stronghold. There is a growing awareness of God among uncompromising Thai Buddhists in their everyday conversations. Whereas, not too many years ago, God was never mentioned outside of a foreigner's religious connotation. Even today, I heard a man make reference to God in a very positive way. I sincerely believe this is the result of decades of prayer... bathed in blood, sweat and tears.

Merry Christmas, and Thank you for your faithful support!

Ron Myers

Ron (and Cheryl) Myers

