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National Broadcast by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister - November 14, 2014



Good evening dear Thai citizens.

Recently, there have been many important regional and international meetings and summits. Taking part in all of these events is necessary for Thailand to strengthen diplomatic ties with other nations and build foreign investors' confidence in the kingdom. It also opens doors for more trade and investment and mobilizes economic growth to improve the quality of life for our people. Later in this program I will talk to you about the results and the outcome of these meetings and how my overseas trip will benefit the Thai people.

Today is another important day which I would like us all to observe – Father of Royal Rainmaking Day. This falls on November 14 of every year. His Majesty the King initiated the royal rainmaking project during his trip to visit his subjects in the Northeast on November 14, 2498 after having learned of the hardships the locals had to endure from the lack of water for consumption and for agriculture. Since then, His Majesty has devoted His efforts towards researching and developing rainmaking technologies, which has thus allowed the country to survive through drought crises until the present day. In order to express our appreciation for His Majesty's benevolence toward Thai citizens, I invite all of us to pay tribute to His Majesty on this day. According to the Royal Household Bureau, HM the King is currently undergoing medical treatment. I therefore ask all Thai citizens to wish for His Majesty's return to good health soon.

Let us now turn to matters of foreign relations.

My delegation and I have made several trips to foreign nations for official visits. All of the visits were important for strengthening our foreign relations, enhancing trust in Thailand, promoting trade and economic collaboration, reiterating Thailand's position of being a democracy, and reaffirming our support and commitment to various international issues. I would like to inform you that Thailand is ready to support investments made by any country that wish to do so, in relation to maintaining the nation's interests.

The government has placed great importance in this matter during each official visit abroad and each interaction with foreign delegations. The visits provide the government the opportunity to propagate its economic policies – strengthening of local economies; promoting SMEs; investing in transportation infrastructure that includes roads, dual track railways, electric trains in Greater Bangkok, water transport and air transport; and preparations toward a digital economy. As I have said before, rest assured that every care is taken to ensure that each of the foreign visits is made on the basis of necessity and benefit to Thailand.

During November 9-11, my delegation visited Beijing, China to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' summit. APEC provides a stage where leaders can simultaneously discuss affairs in many dimensions. 70% of Thailand's foreign trade and investment is made within the APEC zone. Therefore, this meeting is important to further progress of matters important for the strengthening of Thailand and the Asia-Pacific region.

This year, Thailand brought up many important topics at the discussions such as how to ensure true mutual gains for all countries when launching free trade pacts, and how to ensure that all sectors of the populace within each country –farmers and SMEs included – gain from free trade and that no one is left behind.

What can we be done to allow for sustainable development in all APEC member countries? The emphasis should not only be on increasing the expansion rate of the economy, otherwise development will not be sustainable. How can we use innovation to assist growth and improve on the quality of life and on the national development effort? We also discussed regional linkages, reducing developmental gaps, and the handling of transnational problems such as Ebola and the environment.

In addition to the discussions with APEC members, I also engaged in exchanges with leaders of other countries. For China, I paid a courtesy call on President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang. The Chinese leaders wished His Majesty the King good health, and extended their best wishes to all members of the Thai Royal Family. They also hailed the relations between Thailand and China as a 'friendship between great friends'. In our discussions, the Chinese prime minister and I touched on the fact that Thai-China relations have lasted for hundreds of years despite official diplomatic relations reaching its 40th anniversary next year. We discussed how we can improve Thai-Chinese relations even further, on the basis of a great friendship based on mutual respect for one another. China is also facing the problem of oversupply of certain agricultural produce, though the government has maintained its commitment by agreeing to purchase higher quantities of Thai produce such as rice, rubber and fruits. These increases will take place cumulatively over a number of years. We will expedite further talks on the creation of an MOU on the purchase of Thai agricultural produce; this will be a gift for Thai farmers from the Chinese government. I will inform the public of further progress. I have also asked China to help facilitate the importation of Thai agricultural goods, especially fruits and rice that are currently popular within China. I asked them to jointly hold marketing promotions and to also monitor against fake Thai rice. On the matter of inviting China to invest in projects of joint interest, I have informed the Chinese side that their investors are invited to come invest in Thailand, especially in projects that the government is willing to support to great lengths, such as those involved with energy and the environment – the projects are urgent requisites for the development of the nation. The Thai government will be happy to provide additional incentives for said projects, under established BOI principles and with regard to fairness and transparency.

Aside from the Chinese leaders, I met many other leaders who attended the APEC summit, and I also had exchanges with the representatives of the Chinese private sector who expressed interest to invest in Thailand. I would like to note that all meetings involved full-delegation exchanges. I emphasized to all the distinguished individuals I met that Thailand is undergoing a re-organization process that is long overdue, and that we are quickly moving forward with our strategy for sustainable national development. This would pave the way for a strong and sustainable democratic system of governance. The representatives we met were from an assortment of companies – technology, ICT, telecommunication, and rubber companies. Our country is facing the problem of low rubber prices due to the large quantity of supply. Many companies have expressed interest in setting up rubber processing plants in Thailand, at sites near the raw material source; the government will look further into this. There was also the matter of medical equipment and environmentally friendly garbage processing plants. This is already part of the policies of the current government.

I took the opportunity to ask them to support Thailand in several aspects. For example, companies were asked to spread out their plants among different provinces so that employment and income distribution can be achieved among Thais in many provinces. I asked them to place importance in the training of Thai workers and the increased employment of Thais at all levels of operation, in addition to requesting research and development support.

On the matter of cooperation in building dual-track railways and medium-speed railways but not high speed rail, there were only discussions on the principles of the projects. Of course, China is interested in such rail projects as they would link markets together thus making it easier for people to commute within the region, in addition to reducing goods transportation costs. Thailand would also benefit from increased connectivity, especially within the region. Our location puts us at the centre of the South East Asian region; if we do not prepare and improve our roads and rails today, we will be at a disadvantage and be outdated in the future.

The government places importance on developing infrastructure because they are essential for the future success of the country. If we do not invest now, we would still have to invest later, at a more expensive price. We have to quickly implement this, while also ensuring cost effectiveness and preventing graft. Thais should not be incurred a debt resulting from low-quality products. Thailand has been discussing standard-gauge railways and medium-speed trains with China, but we are also talking with several countries that have expressed their interest. This time, we discussed the fundamentals. Details on investment models, environmental impact assessments and public referendums will be worked on.

I also spoke with the leaders of several countries in a bilateral manner. An important matter discussed was the problem of subsidies on farm produce, and fuels. Countries within this region all have this problem.

During the banquet hosted by the Chinese president every participant was very warmly welcomed. I greeted the leaders of all 21 economics – handshakes and all. I met President Obama, who expressed his concerns; I thanked him and assured him the government will do its best. In our encounter, President Putin asked how Thailand was and whether things had settled down. I told him that things were in order, and that we need some time. Although in Thailand there are those who continue to bring up issues of past conflict, the international community has moved on to focus on the direction we are heading, how are reforms are moving ahead and what visions we have after 2015. Of course this will involve the AEC, but fundamentally, the focus was on the future.

Thailand is relatively peaceful now; citizens are happier and safe, and tourism has picked up. The Thai government would like to invite citizens of all countries to visit Thailand, especially during the high season at the years' end. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he would lift the travel advisory still in place. I correspondingly informed every country about our travel insurance program for foreign visitors and everyone was more assured about the security situation.

In the main summit that involved the full delegations of all 21 economics, discussions centered on sustainable development – energy and food security, infrastructure linkages and free trade agreements (FTA). For those worried about the probability of Thailand being at a disadvantage in certain agreements, I want to confirm to you that even though we are not a large country, we will not compromise our dignity or stature. All agreements must be based on mutual trust, without risks and an equal share of equitable benefits. In every visit abroad by the government we take with us the pride and honour of the Thai people. We do not want repeat what has happened in the past where several agreements were made but nothing was accomplished afterwards.

Each country we met posted a variety of queries about Thailand with a view to assisting us and investing with us in order to maintain good relations and enhance mutual trust as friends. I reassured every country that there shall not be corruption in any of the projects, and these projects need to be implemented on a G2G basis. The ministers and all others in the delegation are aware of the details of the discussions.

After attending the APEC Summit in China's Beijing, I travelled to Naypyidaw, Myanmar to join the 25th ASEAN Summit which is an annual event that sees leaders from all ASEAN countries taking part in and is considered the largest and most important meeting of our region. Throughout the entire summit, Thailand was warmly welcomed and appreciated by all members. As Thailand plays a key role in mobilizing regional cooperation, China and other members of ASEAN have much faith in the Thai government. I pledged my commitment to other leaders that I would bring a strong and sustainable democracy back to the nation and its people, which will in turn bring benefit the region as a whole.

Issues discussed during this summit include first of all, the onset of ASEAN Community. Everything is going according to plan and we have made some achievements along the way. The ASEAN Community, with a population of more than 600 million people, will become a single market and production base, thus increasing its leverage in the world stage. As a result, Thailand will become more stable and with its basic infrastructure development moving in a fast pace, Thailand will be a hub of the ASEAN region. Other leaders also agreed that ASEAN Community must have a stronger role in order to lead and maintain peace in Asia-Pacific region.

The second issue that was discussed during the summit, which I also think is important, is having a 10 year vision for the future and strategically setting a direction for ASEAN. We as a group need to move forward with people being the centre of development, improving the quality of life, increasing opportunities, raising income, eliminating social disparities, preventing all forms of criminality, and solving other problems in the society. Also, the leaders agreed that we must promote free trade, eradicate all tariffs and barriers, ensure fair trading, support SME involvement and most importantly, support fellow agriculturists who are the majority of ASEAN Community.

Member countries must find a way to cooperate in maintaining and improving the effectiveness and quality of production, harvesting, marketing, and prices of crops. ASEAN is referred to as the breadbasket of the world as it is the main producer and exporter of agricultural goods which include rice and rubber. There is no need for member countries to compete in terms of price or market share, because doing so would mean less income for our fellow farmers. I will remain concerned and worried as long as people cannot earn enough for a living and then no one will be fulfilled and conflicts will further arise. Most of the conflicts in international society derive from disparities and poverty. If we do not seriously address these issues we will always be dealing with conflict. In the case of Thailand we need to particularly adhere more to His Majesty's Sufficiency Economy philosophy.

The third topic that was discussed was international concerns which comprise the Ebola virus, terrorism, and climate change. At the meeting, I presented the leaders with an example of Thailand's experience fighting SARS and avian flu in the past. Both incidents caused economic downturn due to an ineffective warning system and lack of coordination. I therefore told the meeting that Thailand would be willing to host a Health Ministers Meeting which will be joined by ASEAN members, China, Japan, and South Korea in a bid to prepare our region and further strengthen ties.

As for the South China Sea dispute, Thailand was praised for its success in reducing tensions and pushing for stronger relations between China and ASEAN. The meeting also talked about setting up a regional framework for members to build confidence with one another and to reduce chances that could lead to misunderstanding, in particular the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea and Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Meanwhile at the APEC Summit, I had an opportunity to officially hold bilateral talks with other leaders –the Prime Minister of Japan, the President of the ROK, the Prime Minister of India, the Prime Minister of Russia, and the Secretary General of the United Nations – all of whom took part in this very summit. It was very positive that all of the leaders I met voiced their understanding and support for Thailand at this juncture and expressed hope that the kingdom would be able to adhere to the Roadmap and achieve its goal.

Russia showed great interest in mutual cooperation on energy, tourism, trade and investment as well as importing Thai agricultural products. Japan and the ROK expressed their interest in making investments in Thailand's basic infrastructure and trade in order to help Thailand enhance its competitiveness. With India, we agreed to cooperation closer in terms of more trade and investment opportunities, more tourists, and stronger cooperation on national security and defence as well as firmer connectivity between Thailand, Myanmar, and India.

Lastly, I met with the UN Secretary-General to whom I expressed my appreciation to for his support and understanding. On this occasion, I informed him of the current situation and the government's reform plans to restore true and strong democracy in the kingdom. In response, the UN Secretary-General complimented Thailand for its active role in peacekeeping, promoting sustainable development, resolving climate change, and tackling the Ebola outbreak. My fellow Thais, following this trip abroad, I would like to inform you that we have progressed and can see a brighter future. Thailand as the centre of ASEAN and as an economic hub of Southeast Asia should make the most out of this opportunity for the well being of our citizens. I ask that every Thai citizen take a step back, make sacrifices, and stop fighting each other. We need to understand that politics is politics. Politics must be transparent, just, and most importantly played under democratic rules. It must be a democracy for all, both the majority and the minority.

I thank all those individuals for their cooperation to help make Thailand a more happy and peaceful country. The Domestic economy has seen some positive signs of recovery as many foreign investors have shown greater interest in making investments in the kingdom. According to a survey conducted recently in 39 Asia-Pacific countries, Thailand is ranked 8th on the ease of doing business index in the next 3-5 years, along with Malaysia and Japan. The survey was conducted by PwC Thailand. This indicates that foreign investors are still confident in Thailand. To ensure future economic growth, the government will need to further enhance Thailand's potential in many sectors in order to increase its competitiveness ahead of the ASEAN integration.

As for basic infrastructure, logistics, and skilled labour, the government is making sure that all of these sectors meet the demand and are conducive to future FDIs (foreign direct investments). The tourism sector as well has a tendency to regain its footing as Thailand has seen an increasing number of tourists since October while hotel occupancy rate in December is already high. Due to this fact, more than 25 million tourists from around the world are expected to visit Thailand this year and in order to further promote tourism, the government has come up with a slogan for the country, which reads "Discover Thainess 2015". As the name suggests, "Thainess" will be the focal point of next year's tourism industry and will highlight the true nature of Thailand based on "Thainess", which is to live peacefully and happily by embracing our differences with kindness and warmth.

Our next topic is about the current flooding in southern provinces. The government is much concerned about the flood situation in 6 provinces including Chumphon, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Trang, Phatthalung, Krabi, and Pattani where 3,573 families are affected. I have instructed all responsible units to speed up assistance for the victims. This assistance ranges from protecting lives, properties, and agricultural produce, facilitating communication routes, as well as providing health care and preventing infectious diseases. The government will also speed up the rehabilitation process, so that the residents can have their normal lives back as soon as possible. Because the government realizes that flooding is a recurring problem, all related agencies are told to regularly inspect all dams, reservoirs, basins, and waterways for safety reasons as well as to make sure that all warning systems are in good condition and ready for use. I would like to send my moral support to all residents in the south. Although the flooding has eased, all sectors still need to be on high alert for any unexpected occurrences, especially during the monsoon season.

As for other matters, government agencies, the National Reform Council, and the National Legislative Assembly are working hard to put short-term and long-term policies in place. I want to introduce to you a project dubbed "Rak Kaew" which was launched in cooperation between educational institutions, communities, the media, and generous sponsors. The vision of the campaign is to create a network comprising educators, students, and members of the public who are willing to use the knowledge they have to resolve problems and bring a better quality of life to community members. The goal must be achieved by combining His Majesty the King's concept and knowledge of our communities, and together create a society of learning that is conducive to problem solving and sustainable development. The public can view and follow the results and outcome of the campaign on "Pan Fan The Bundit" program which is aired every Saturday on NOW TV 26, starting 14:00 pm until 15:00 pm. More details can be obtained via online media. This is only one of many other constructive campaigns that I would like all Thais to learn from and apply so as to make Thailand a strong community.

Now let us talk about reconciliation and reform. Both matters should not be inextricably linked with legal process, laws, and legal investigations. Laws and regulations are not compulsory for every reconciliation issue as we must reconcile through understanding and sympathy. The next issue I would like to address is the economy. Please do not be overly concerned over the current economic situation. Everything will get better gradually. Other leaders told me that they were facing economic slowdown as well while economies in some countries are even worse than us. If everyone and every sector in the country can cooperate, I am certain that the economy will improve by the first quarter next year.

As for problems that occur in government organizations and local state offices, I will not put the blame on any particular group, but instead, ask for cooperation, understanding and sacrifice in order for us to resolve all problems. Furthermore, all sectors need to help monitor and prevent acts of corruption. There are a lot of rumours going around that are not true and groundless, claiming that military officials and the NCPO are taking bribes. If the media push ahead to present this kind of story, you must have a solid proof to back your story. I ask that the media avoid writing stories out of thin air -otherwise, you will be defaming the government and the NCPO. If authorities are found involved in corruption, they will receive harsh punishments regardless of who they are. I insist that all transaction processes must be transparent.

Lastly, I want my fellow citizens to consider enjoying more constructive TV programs, or you can watch soap operas if it makes you happy. I might talk about some serious issues today. I appreciate the audience for listening and for your patience. The reason I talk to you every week is because I want you to understand. Thank you again for listening to me. I apologize for speaking fast due to the limited time that I have on this show.

Thank you and goodbye.