After The Thai Coup - Keeping Up With The New Rules

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I'm going to get back to writing about business now that the festering political crisis seems to be over with the coup d'état of a week ago. Besides, there's a strong feeling that General Prayuth Chan-ocha, Thailand's new leader, is running out of patience with journalists and public displays of dissent.

Here I'll provide some news sources for tourists and others concerned about immediate issues like the curfew. For the most part, it's an update of the sources provided in this post back in December when the anti-government PDRC street protests began in earnest.

I wasn't in Thailand during the last coup in 2006, so I don't know if the initial actions of junta, called the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), fall into a familiar pattern. There's reason to believe, though, that Thailand won't see elections any time soon. Professor Duncan McCargo makes a convincing case this coup is different from the most recent two or three.



Anti-coup protesters defy martial law at Bangkok's Victory Monument

Yes, the BBC and CNN broadcasts are blocked and scores of Thai-language TV stations are awaiting approval of the NCPO before they can resume services. Nonetheless, it isn't that difficult to keep up with the news of new edicts and administrative developments.

Best English News Sources on Thailand

The English news on the website of MCOT, the government broadcasting company is one place to start. On Twitter, it's @MCOT_Eng. Then there's the government public relations department. These will probably be the first to publish any new rules about curfews or warnings to tourists. The curfew is now midnight until 4 am but doesn't seem to be too strictly enforced, especially outside large urban areas. It probably won't last too much longer. Bangkok's Skytrain and subway are now running until 11 pm, but will probably soon return to the usual midnight shutdown.

The most efficient way to keep up might be on Twitter. Do a search of #thaicoup there. Richard Barrow @RichardBarrow is always up on breaking news of interest to tourists.

People on Twitter frequently link to Thailand coverage by Reuters and other wire services and the *Wall Street Journal,* all of which have permanent staff in Thailand.

The two English-language newspapers, *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation,* generally supported the PDRC protesters' goals for the past six months--that is, ousting the elected Pheu Thai government. But they aren't burying the news about officials now being removed from posts and mega-projects likely to be scrapped.

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Khao Sod is a Thai-language newspaper, part of the *Matichon* group, which was more supportive of the Pheu ThaiParty, elections and the United Front For Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD). *Khao Sod* translates some articles into English. All Thai newspapers are mainly omitting analysis and opinion columns for now. The newspapers all have Facebook and Twitter presences, of course. So does Radio Free Asia.

The independent website Prachatai,which has some English translations, hasn't been blocked yet.

For analysis of what it all means, do Google searches to find the blogs of Bangkok Pundit, New Mandala, and Saksith Saiyasombut. Two Thai academics that are frequently interviewed by foreign media are Thitinan Pongsudhirak of Chulalongkorn University and Pavin Chachavalpongpun of Kyoto University. Saksith, who is based in Germany, and Bangkok Pundit post on Twitter fairly often. Affiliated with the ousted government, Rajprasong_News is still posting on both Twitter and Facebook. As for the UDD, postings on their Redshirts website stopped several days ago and now it is blocked in Thailand by the government. Red Throughout the Land is still tweeting as @UDD_English.

A Little Perspective: Thailand is Hardly Vietnam

And let's keep things in perspective.

Can you ever imagine a story like this one in the *Bangkok Post* or this in *The Nation* published in Vietnamese media? Well, not without some kind smear about terrorist connections or foreign conspiracy. All Vietnamese media organizations have some kind of government affiliation. (Actually, I can't imagine stories like that about Singapore in Singapore news media.) A week of anti-Chinese riots in Vietnam in May, at least six dead, the Chinese government evacuating thousands--and were there any eyewitness journalistic accounts? Any firsthand, credited photos?

From afar, Thailand might appear to be more of a basket case simply because there's so much media coverage; the Thai media are,or have been, quite freewheeling; and many foreign media organizations have some kind of reporters here. If they are interested in politics, Thais don't hesitate to tell me their leanings. And there's no lack of foreign residents who feel free to unload their political opinions in person or online.

This is a good place to emphasize that the protests of the past six months never targeted foreigners. Neither did the UDD protests back in 2010. Meanwhile, Vietnamese didn't just attack mainland Chinese, their historical enemy. Taiwanese and South Koreans were attacked as well.

Cautious Photography

What we will probably see now are more small spontaneous protests popping up in different places--like the small silent groups that have been standing in public places reading *1984* or civil disobedience manuals. These protests probably won't be announced on Twitter, where authorities can tune in as well.

I would advise foreigners to be cautious about taking photos of anti-coup protesters if soldiers are around, however. There aren't many protesters now because the almost daily 5 pm gathering at Victory Monument has been overseen by lines and lines of both cops and soldiers. On Thursday afternoon, the military sealed off the area as a preemptive measure. Though the newly issued laws about protests are harsh, in practice those detained at the anti-coup protests so far have been released quickly. That's what happened to the foreigner detained a few days ago at the Victory Monument gathering while wearing a t-shirt printed with "Peace, please." But how long will that tolerance last?

Finally, if they aren't yet friends, please don't ask Thais their opinions of the monarchy.

Update June 10: Another final bit of advice: Be cautious where you flaunt the three-finger salute from *The Hunger Games* movies because it has become gesture of the anti-coup movement. Taxi drivers and motorcycle taxi drivers find it amusing, though.