



Thailand: The politics of blood

Commentary

In Thailand the international media is the battleground for political ideas.

In November 2008 thousands of yellow shirted protestors staged a sit in at Bangkok airport, stranding tourists and bringing Thailand's political turmoil to television screens around the world.

archive/ tourist

I don't really understand what's going on with the politics but I don't want to know. But all I know is I think it is bad for them.

Commentary:

Their actions lead to the fall of the government and return to power of the former political elites.

In response a series of protests by red shirted citizens soon followed.

Duncan McCargo

We're talking about two main sides here.

The Yellow Shirts are people who are broadly aligned with, the current government, the Democrat Party, the military, and Thailand's traditional institutions.

Opposing them are the red shirts, they are broadly ... aligned with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was a popular elected figure who was ousted from power in a military coup in 2006. All these movements live and die by media.

BBC presenter

It is a symbolic gesture but it is one with the media very much in mind. They are trying to keep the momentum of this protest going.

Commentary

The protests have become increasingly dramatic and well organised. Red Shirts in their thousands donated their own blood and poured it on the walls and under the gates of Government House.

But it is not only the protest movements, the government is also using powerful imagery and media coverage to make political points –by for example organising symbolic cleansing of the reds from the streets.

The red shirt protests were initially peaceful, but in April 2010 events turned violent as the army moved in to stop the demonstrations.

Donna Guest

Almost 100 people were killed, hundreds were injured, there was great violence, great destruction in this protest which turned violent on several occasions.... And where the security forces at certain points shot at people not posing any threat to them ...

Commentary

An emergency decree was declared restricting media coverage and forums considered a threat to national security.

Donna Guest

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the emergency decree.

We're concerned with the restrictions on freedom of expression, very vaguely worded provisions of this decree allow for censorship. Many websites have been shut down.

Article 17, provides for complete impunity for all officials. So this is problematic because some of the security forces may be found to have been committing human rights violations, and yet can they be brought to justice?

Commentary:

Behind the arresting symbolism, the imagery of the protests and fight for media attention, there are real issues at stake – of democracy, welfare, education and human rights.

Donna Guest:

It's not going to go away. And if they do have elections, there's no, there's no predicting that that's going to solve the crisis.

Duncan McCargo:

Thailand's been living with a huge number of political contradictions, which are really unsustainable and sooner or later have to be resolved.

People have voting rights and so on, but are those things what really matters, or are traditional institutions like the military, the Buddhist order, do they have superiority over electoral politics or are they operating alongside or subordinated to electoral politics?