

Thailand Daily News Summary

Prime Minister Abhisit "Mark" Vejjajiva told the media yesterday that he "had checked" with the military and received assurances that no untoward actions were taken against Rohingya economic migrants. He added that reports of mistreatment, including beatings, dumping bound prisoners overboard and abandoning several hundred on the high seas without resources were "exaggerated." Numerous international news reports and comments from Indian officials have alleged the Thai Navy had towed nearly 1,000 Burmese Rohingya and Bangladeshis out to the sea in December. More than 500 of them went missing and may have died. An official of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) welcomed Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban's announcement he had ordered the defense minister to investigate claims of abuse. As with most notable events in Thailand, a political spin was introduced when local reporters asked the Abhisit if he thought the story was manufactured to "make his government look bad." *PM Abhisit's political survival depends upon continued support of the military.*

www.nationmultimedia.com/2009/01/21/politics/politics_30093761.php,
www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/135943/pm-rohingya-reports-exaggerated

Government and judicial actions to enforce Thailand's *lese majesté* law continue to generate controversy. Yesterday, police charged Ji Ungpakorn, a political scientist at Chulalongkorn University — one of the country's leading universities — for comments in his 2007 book, "A Coup For The Rich." After leaving the police station, Ji told the media, "This is a way of shutting up people and silencing opponents, especially opponents to the military dictatorship in 2006." Two days ago, a criminal court sentenced an Australian author to 3 years in prison for comments made in a book he authored that sold less than a dozen copies. On a related note, a petition signed by 128 academics from around the world called for the charges against Ji to be dropped, saying that prosecution of the academic "represents the most fundamental attack on freedom of speech."

www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hVnTHd0lxIMajkIApquinef_4ychgD95QPU0G0

Cracks are already beginning to appear along political fault lines in the current coalition government. Yesterday, Ministry of Interior Permanent Secretary Peerapol Tritasawit was peremptorily removed from his job and assigned to an inactive post. "Permanent Secretary" is a civil service position and usually held by career civil servants. Under the previous administration, Peerapol played a role in the sacking of Saksayam Chidchob from his job in the ministry. Saksayam is the younger brother of Newin Chidchob, current leader of the "Friends of Newin" faction that is helping to prop up Abhisit's shaky coalition government. Other than saying Peerapol's removal was "work related," administration officials could give no reason for his transfer. *The move is further indication that small coalition parties, such as the recently formed Phum Jai Thai (Proud Thais) Party, exert disproportionate influence over PM Abhisit and his Democrat Party led coalition government.*

www.nationmultimedia.com/2009/01/21/politics/politics_30093758.php

After lengthy negotiations, Apple Computer has successfully introduced the I-Phone into the Thai market through an agreement with mobile phone service provider True Move. However, analysts are doubtful the I-Phone will be successful in the Thai market for a variety of

reasons. Despite its potential marketing appeal, there is speculation surrounding how many Thai users will be able to take full advantage of the iPhone 3G's rich features due to spotty 3G coverage and lack of education about the phone's advantages, in addition to the lack of heavy data related usage in Thailand. Analysts also note that given the phone's high price tag, the iPhone does not make sense for consumers and operators in countries where voice calls dominate mobile use, and data/Wi-Fi usage isn't very high. Thai mobile operators last year decided to downsize their investment in 3G network upgrades, which could result in a large group of iPhone users without a fast, native network on which to use their phone.

<http://java.sys-con.com/node/813303>

Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) President Prasert Bunsumpun said yesterday that he would seek an additional 65 billion baht (US\$ 1.9 billion) for its investment plan to refinance debts, fund new projects and collect working capital. The executive board yesterday approved the five-year investment plan ending in 2013. The 65 billion baht is part of the total budget of 229.34 billion for new investment. Under the plan, 58% of the total budget or 132.84 billion baht will finance its natural-gas business and 35%, or around 80.6 billion baht, will be invested in its subsidiaries' and joint-venture companies' projects. Most of the investment projects involve natural-gas grid development, the sixth gas-separation plant, a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal, the PTT Green Energy biofuel business, the joint venture with Asahi to build a petrochemical plant and natural gas for vehicles (NGV) service stations.

www.bangkokpost.com/business/economics/10046/ptt-to-raise-b65bn-for-investments

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