

What Thai Prime Minister Abhisit really offered today

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Contents

- [What Thai Prime Minister \(...\)](#)
- [UDD's answer to Abhisit \(...\)](#)

What Thai Prime Minister Abhisit really offered today

Thai Prime Minister Abhisit trumpeted that he was making an important initiative today to “solve” the political crisis. He offered to dissolve parliament in September and hold elections on 14th November 2010. Previously he had said that he would not dissolve parliament until December. Yet even this offer was conditional on there being “peace in society”. That means that he and his military-backed government could just go back on this proposal and claim that conditions were “not yet right” for elections nearer the time. While Abhisit was making his proposal, the Military Security Command and Deputy Prime Minister Sutep were threatening to send tanks and armed soldiers in to disperse the pro-democracy Red Shirt protesters in the centre of Bangkok. They still called them “terrorists”. This is not the kind of behaviour which will help lead to a peaceful settlement.

Abhisit's statement was full of lies and excuses. On the Monarchy, Abhisit continued to accuse Red Shirts of undermining the institution, when it is the undemocratic actions of the Military, the Yellow Shirt mobs and the Government, all carried out in the name of the King, which have turned people against the Monarchy. Abhisit also lied that he upheld the freedom of the press and the media. His government has instigated the most draconian censorship of the media in living memory and it continues to do so. He conveniently ignored the issue of the military coup in 2006 and all the undemocratic measures taken by him and his allies since, claiming that the root cause of the crisis was economic inequality. Such inequality is indeed important, but it cannot be divorced from the attack on democratic rights. It is this attack on freedom which is designed to maintain the economic inequalities in Thai society for the benefit of the elites.

Abhisit offered to set up an “independent” committee to look into the 10th April bloodshed when he and his government sent tanks and armed soldiers against unarmed prodemocracy demonstrators. From past experience he cannot be trusted. The political crisis since 2006 makes it almost impossible to find anyone who could be neutral or independent. The National Human Rights Commission is staffed by royalist Yellow Shirts and the judiciary has been highly compromised. The only solution would be to appoint a committee made up of equal representatives from both sides of the divide and to find someone from outside Thailand, perhaps from ASEAN, to chair such a committee.

The Red Shirts have been very determined in their struggle for Democracy. They have held a prolonged protest since mid March. They have faced the armed might of the Military and a whole host of lies from the mainstream media. They will be ready for negotiations, but they should not

settle for a poor compromise. All charges against Red Shirts should be dropped and all those in prison, resulting from the protest, should be immediately released. The censorship must end. Abhisit should apologise for all the lies he said about the Red Shirts and he should step down so that someone else can take his place as a caretaker Prime Minister. The emergency decree must be immediately lifted and troops returned to barracks and the head of the army and the major political actors must promise to respect the democratic wishes of the people.

Fresh elections will only be the start of a solution to the deep crisis. Thailand needs drastic changes; political, social and economic. The lese majeste law must be scrapped and political prisoners released. Inequality must be tackled by introducing a welfare state funded by taxing the rich. The military Constitution should also be scrapped and the army should be cut down to a bare minimum. To push forward with these necessary changes, the Red Shirts need to expand their organisation into the trade unions and the lower ranks of the army.

UDD's answer to Abhisit 4th May

1. UDD is happy to enter negotiations and the process of solving the crisis.
2. UDD wants to know the exact date of the dissolution of parliament since the election date is determined by the Election Commission, not the Prime Minister.
3. The Government must stop all repressive measures. The citizens must have freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and freedom to receive information via all forms of media.
4. The UDD leadership does not seek any pardon for charges of overthrowing the Monarchy or charges of terrorism. They are happy to fight all charges in court. Similarly, those responsible for ordering soldiers to kill unarmed civilians should not receive any pardon. The Government must press forward with cases against the PAD for seizing the airports.
5. All sides must stop using the Monarchy for political purposes.