

# Failed media in a failed democracy

Saturday 23 September 2006, by [ROJANAPHRUK Pravit](#) (Date first published: 22 September 2006).

**The article below - 'Failed media in a failed democracy' by Pravit Rojanaphruk, a senior staff member at *The Nation*, was refused by his own newspaper.**

Despite the seemingly wide acceptance of the public, especially the urban middle classes and old elites, towards Tuesday's night coup, there's still no solid guarantee that the coup will solve more problems than it may end up creating.

Did the coup leaders "solved" Thaksin Shinawatra dilemma only to have created more newer problems? Can two wrongs make thing right, is a question that needs to be considered.

While it may be too premature to be conclusive about it, the current facts speak for itself that on Tuesday's night, Thailand was transformed from a police-state in the making, run by business-political group led by Thaksin, into to a militarised society ruled by guns and tanks, calling itself the "Administrative Reform Council under Democratic System with His Majesty the King as the Head".

Judging from its name, the coup leaders want to break the law, overthrow a corrupt and abusive but albeit legally elected government, and still calling themselves "democratic".

The name of the coup group is itself a contradiction in term as it called itself "democratic" while it opted for undemocratic means to "restore democracy".

Thailand's status as a failed democracy became all too apparent on Tuesday's night. Actually it has become a failed democracy long before Tuesday, and that status continues today.

Majority of the Thai media have failed to uphold it often boast as its sacred principle of press freedom and has over the past three days been quite accommodating or even supportive of the coup makers. They directly or in-directly helped reinforce a belief that the coup is not only inevitable, but acceptable and even inherently good.

The coup leaders even summoned all news editors yesterday (Thursday) to discuss how the media can remain "constructive" in carrying out their duty into the foreseeable future.

On Wednesday, the coup leadership had already used its gun-boat power to order all media to censor any writing or reporting that could jeopardised its efforts "to reform politics towards democracy". That was on top of another order banning political gathering of five or more persons, making it "illegal" and subject to maximum of six months imprisonment.

So on Tuesday's night, Thailand's press went from being under the vicious threat, control and manipulation, of a savvy billionaire-turned-prime minister to that of one literally being under control and "protection" of the military's guns and tanks.

As this article went to press, 40 armed soldiers are still guarding the Nation Multimedia Group (NMG) which owns and ran The Nation newspaper and Nation Television, for the third consecutive

day.

Critical BBC and CNN coverage on Thailand, broadcasted through the kingdom's UBC Cable Television, Thailand's biggest cable TV operator, have also been interrupted with music and pictures of Hollywood stars like Angelina Jolie and Tom Cruise appearing instead. The programming will return shortly, was the message on the screen in English which appeared yesterday, without any explanation while the programmes have to disappear at all.

Some journalists even think like the coup leaders, saying it's "natural" for coup makers to curb press freedom because they would need sometime to crackdown on pro-Thaksin media and elements.

Thaksin infamously think that any media which criticise the then ruling-party and his administration are not being "constructive" and is his enemy, and tries to eliminate them through various means. Now, the junta leaders, and even some journalists, appear to think just like Thaksin's. When journalist's thinking and rationale are becoming akin and approbatic to the coup leaders, then democratic culture is truly endangered.

The public who support the coup, they were said on some local televisions yesterday (Thursday) that the media is "free at last".

At present, the broadcast media is encouraged or even insisted upon, to criticise Thaksin at will. When state-controlled broadcast media chameleonly changed colour overnight after a coup, it has neither become free nor independent - it just got a new boss - who's expecting those televisions to be equally subservient to them.

Both Thaksin and his nemesis, the coup leaders who toppled him, apparently believe that Thai people are not mature enough to be able to make sound judgement, through open debate and free press, by themselves. Both the old administration of Thaksin and the new regime apparently do not think that people can and should think for themselves.

For the press to continue to give the coup leaders the luxury of a honeymoon period and resigned itself to the inevitability of the coup, citing half a dozen or more reasons why people should simply accept and endorse the new regime, the Thai press is itself committing a professional suicide in the eyes of the world. It has abandoned its responsibility as a watchdog, and turning itself into a lapdog.

They have failed to litmus test of press freedom.

How long such illegitimate and unconstitutional orders will last, we do not know. But surely, it will have a long-lasting impact instilling into the mind of a younger generation of Thais that indeed using brute force to settle differences, is not only an acceptable but a preferred method of solving political and all other differences.

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**P.S.**

\* Circulated on the Asia Social Movements mailing list. source:

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