

South Thailand : Military Junta exploits of King's passing could backfire in Patani

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The Military Junta should be careful how it reacts to the passing of King Bhumibol. Emotions are high right now in Thailand which the military will no doubt aim to exploit to consolidate its political power over the country.

In fact, the Military Junta has already taken steps to intensify its attack on freedom of expression by demanding all internet service providers (ISPs) to spy on its users and report any "inappropriate content". Prachatai reported that the secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBCT) has threatened to persecute ISPs which do not comply with this order and even international social media giants Facebook and Twitter are expected to get in line.

The Junta's actions mean that it has decided to continue its disregard of the international community's concern over the right to freedom of opinion and expression and calls for the repeal of Article 112 of the Criminal Code (lèse-majesté) which was voiced during Thailand's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the United Nations Human Rights Council on May 11 2016.

Arbitrary arrests were another major concern raised during Thailand's UPR. Earlier this week on October 12 2016, police and military personnel arrested 44 Patani Malay students in Bangkok under the guise of national security yet no evidence has been presented against the detained students and it was reported that the State officials who arrested the students did not even know the names of all of the people they arrested.

The Military Junta will likely use recent events to silence remaining dissidents but if it decides to further exploit the current mood of the nation to suppress and mistreat Patani Malay activists, the Patani Liberation Movement will likely look to exploit State abuses for their own political advantages including drawing more support from the Patani Malay population.

The conflict in the contested Patani/Deep South region of Thailand clearly escalated after human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings committed by State officials which occurred in Tak Bai in Narathiwat province on October 25 2004 when 85 demonstrators died. Many of the civilians who were arrested and beaten by the military and police at the demonstration in Tak Bai ended up joining the Liberation Movement and some even became high ranking commanders.

The Military Junta would be wise not to make the same mistakes of former Thai governments if it wishes to avoid prolonging or even intensifying the conflict in Patani.

Patani Malay student activists are planning to commemorate the 12th anniversary of Tak Bai on October 25. After the recent arbitrary arrests of the students in Bangkok, many people will understandably be on edge. If the Military Junta decides to ban such peaceful initiatives like it did on International Peace Day last month in Patani, the response could be highly destructive for peace in the region and will only make violence seem like the only option to many for creating political

change.

Adam John

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* Prachatai. 17 Oct 2016 05:21 PM PDT :
<http://prachatai.org/english/node/6659?utm>