

Thai Color Politics: Still in Darkness

By

Kavi Chongkittavorn,
Columnist, The Nation
Asia Pacific Roundtable
June 3-5, 2013



Satellite
image of
Thailand
on 22 Ma
2013 at
20.00 hrs
when the
south
suffers a
blackout.



**Sunday 2 June
2013 at 15.00
hrs, Central
World**







On the same day...Thaksin supporters wear Red Mask



Red Mask supporters at Siam Square, 2 June 2013, 17.30 hrs.

Thailand: 3 years after 2010 May violence

On the surface, pretty normal and stable, no major political disruptions on streets, only inside the Parliament, economic growth 4.5 per cent

PM Yingluck's reconcilable image was ruined after she attacked the state of Thai democracy and defended her brother, Thaksin, in Ulan Bator, Mongolia in April

Yingluck's sister, Yaowapa, who just won a by-election in Chiangmai but much less *photogenic*, is poised to replace her awaiting a signal from Thaksin

Continued with populist policies: first house, first car, first tablet, 300 baht maximum wage, 15,000 baht salary for BA holders, rice mortgage plan, etc

Peace process in southern provinces is uncertain as violence continues unabated

Thailand now has to deal with its own "non-colonial" experience as the rest of ASEAN move ahead i.e. Myanmar

Bringing Thaksin back is still the top priority of Pheu Thai Party

Bringing back Thaksin

Living in exile since 2006 in Doha, wanting to return to Thailand as a hero, not a fugitive slapped with a two-year imprisonment

In his several Skype sessions recently, he urged his supporters to bring him home through proposed amnesty bills

Two proposed bills:

- 1) Reconciliation Bill by MP Worachai Hema seeking amnesty for all political offenders except protest leaders and those who ordered the use of forces;
- 2) Amnesty Bill proposed by Deputy Prime Minister Chalerm Yoobamrung last month offers a blanket amnesty for all political offenders since 2006

(If all efforts fail, a high possibility of new election as Thaksin has threatened to dissolve the Parliament)

Thailand's external relations

Try to reinvigorate the alliance system with the US—after the US rebalancing effort--but still very disconnected due to enemy deprivation
Japan, a traditional friend and source of development aid, is moving toward Myanmar, a new regional game changer

Thailand is now heavily counting on China due to growing economic linkages i.e. more than 3,000 km of high-speed train linking Laos to southern Thailand and beyond

India is an option—but slow in coming, more serious engagement needed

Due to unsettling domestic politics, the Thai role in Asean has become less significant—except being the coordinator of Asean-China relations

Although living in exile, Thaksin still steers Thai foreign policy and decides on key issues ahead of Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Thai media is now “for rent”

Journalists fail to articulate important issues of the day, especially those related to corruption and incompetency of ruling government

Media outlets are fragmented, self-interested and often cater to their own audience

Mainstream media outlets, except the Thai Public Broadcasting Service, are under the spell of Pheu Thai Party

Opposition Party, Democrat Party, has its Blue Sky Station, a cable TV channel and other affiliated cabled stations that counter the government's public relations

Over 7,000 community radio stations, mainly unregistered, are under influence of the ruling party and local leaders and businessmen

Media space is for “rent”—government advertisements proliferate, generating huge revenue for media outlets—bribery by a different name

Thailand's outlook: Not Yet Out of Darkness

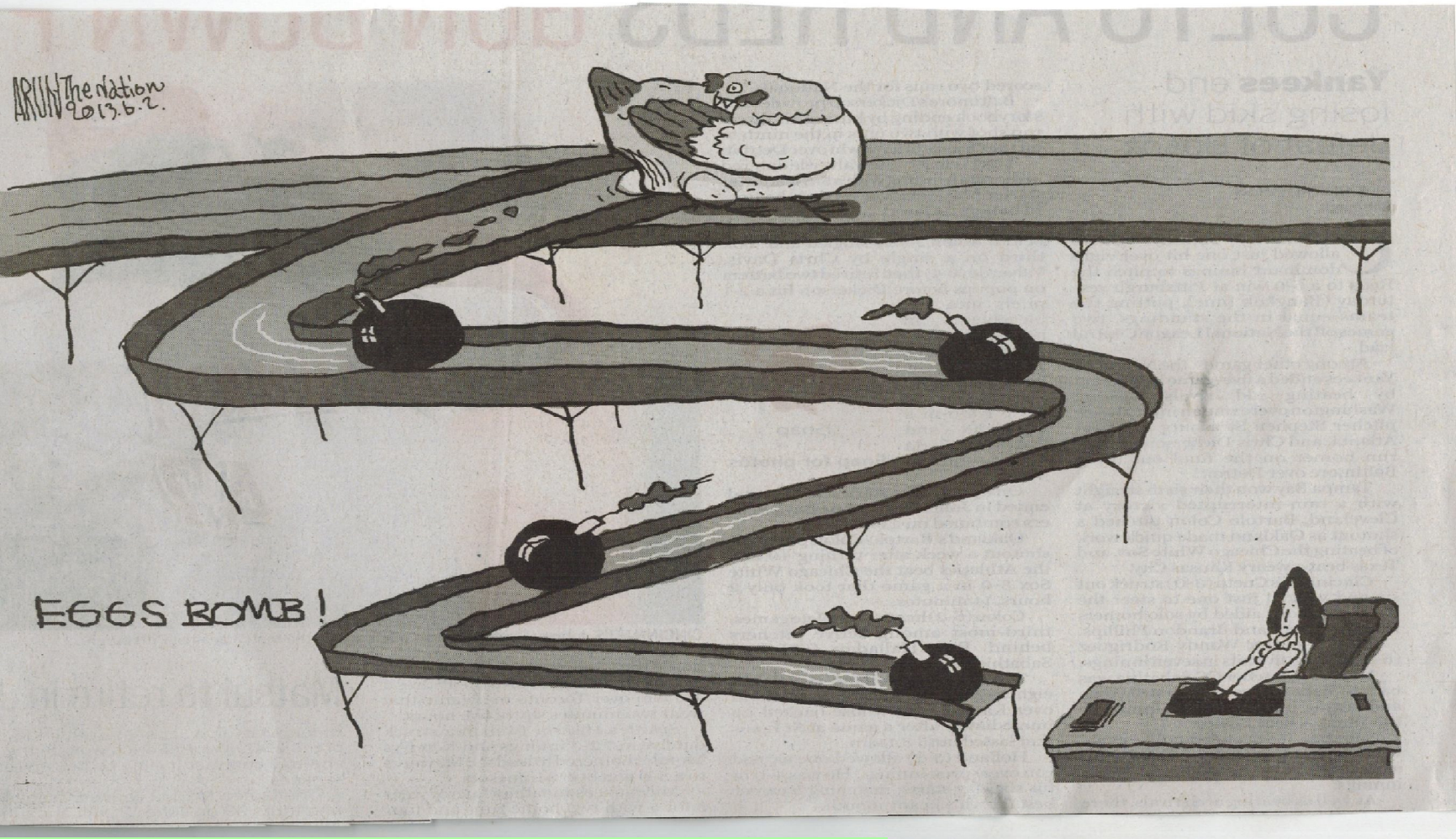
At best, it is unpredictable depending on the deliberation of two bills: Reconciliation Bill and Amnesty Bill when the Parliament starts a new session in August

Color politic continues in the form of White and Red Masks

Renewal of anti-Thaksin and pro-Thaksin confrontation could intensify and turn ugly in weeks and months to come

Economic growth will continue but at a lower rate (4.2-4.5 per cent), expect more economic stimulated packages

Thai democracy progresses little and is still very problematic: the democratically elected government is not transparent and accountable, lacking rule of law, abuse of power, etc.



Price
of
one
egg is
4.50
baht

Can the price of one egg topple the government?

Thank You
Terima kasih
Enjoy your dinner!