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Q&A: Thailand's coup impact

A military coup in Thailand has seen the ousting of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.



Gen Sonthi says he plans a return to democracy

Why did the coup happen now?

Mr Thaksin, who came to power in 2001, has proved a controversial and divisive leader.

Although he was extremely popular with Thailand's rural poor, his abrasive style and huge wealth won him many enemies and appeared to split the nation.

Mounting protests earlier this year undermined his position.

But it was his easy victory in April's general election - subsequently declared invalid - that may have prompted the generals to act.

Their assessment may have been that since Mr Thaksin's wealth and politically dominant Thai Rak Thai party made him electorally unbeatable, a coup was the only way to get rid of him.

All that remained was to choose a date. With new elections set for later this year, they seem to have decided to act swiftly, taking advantage of the fact he was out of the country at the UN's General Assembly.

What does it mean for Thailand?

That depends on how long the military holds on to power.

The coup's leader, Gen Sonthi Boonyaratglin, said he wanted to restore democracy after a year, once a new constitution had been written.

If that timetable is achieved, many Thais will probably give a sigh of relief.

But there will be real worries that Gen Sonthi, like previous coup leaders, may find it hard to give up power - or rebuild

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democracy to the military's liking - so quickly.

The longer he stays, the greater the risk that the same groups who protested in their thousands against the "autocratic" Mr Thaksin will turn their frustration on the high-minded military.

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What does the coup mean for the region?

It is a severe setback.

Thailand had not suffered a coup in 15 years, and had started to boast about being a stable democracy at the heart of South East Asia.

Now, as pictures flash around the world of tanks in central Bangkok, the country's institutions have again been proved to be flimsy, and its military shown up to be still untrusting of democracy and its conflicts.

The coup is also bad news for Western hopes of change in Thailand's neighbour, Burma.

Thailand is one of the few countries with real influence over Burma's repressive military junta.

But Gen Sonthi is hardly likely to press Burma's leaders to introduce democracy, and they will see his coup as a justification for inaction.

What about Thailand's economy?

As well as being hit by the 2004 tsunami, Thailand's economic growth was already being pegged back by political uncertainty as this year's protests against Mr Thaksin rumbled on.

The problem is now likely to get worse as nervy companies delay investment and the former government's spending programmes come under scrutiny.

While tourists may keep coming, foreign investors will be watching extremely closely to see what happens to Shin Corp, the mobile phone group which Mr Thaksin's family sold to Singaporean investors in January.

The sale of such an important Thai business was seen by many Thais as unpatriotic and triggered the anti-Thaksin protests.

Any moves to regain control of the company would send shock waves through Thai business.

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Thais cheery over military coup

By Jonathan Head
BBC News, Bangkok

This week Thailand experienced its first military coup for 15 years. In an unexpected move the army commander overthrew the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Mr Thaksin had been under growing pressure to step down over alleged corruption and abuses of power, but remained very popular in the countryside.

It started with royal music and familiar pictures of the king being played continuously on an army-run television station. That was strange, even during this year, the 60th anniversary of Thailand's much-loved monarch.

So rumours of a coup started to circulate like wildfire. But there had been coup rumours all year and it was hard to believe that the people of Thailand, now a vibrant, pluralistic democracy, would tolerate something as unfashionable as tanks and soldiers on the streets.



The new leadership is consolidating its hold on power

Well, they didn't just tolerate it, they welcomed it with open arms. Mr Thaksin was the most popular political leader in recent Thai history, the first to win an outright majority in parliament. And yet the troops who had forced him out were cheered and festooned with flowers. What on earth was going on?

Like many other East Asian societies, Thais place enormous weight on the value of harmony, avoiding open conflict wherever possible. That has not been easy as the country has undergone dramatic economic growth, creating yawning disparities in wealth but the unbreakable faith people here put in their aging monarch, King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, to guarantee that harmony has helped them live with these wrenching changes.

An entire elite network of businessmen, military officers and bureaucrats has flourished from its connections to the palace, monopolising most of the wealth from Thailand's spectacular growth. The system worked well, despite a succession of military coups, up until the 1990s.

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Modern politics

There was forgiveness for armed rebels, and the aura of royal benevolence for the rural poor. The king travelled frequently into the countryside, and started his own agricultural development projects.

But confidence in this arrangement fell apart after the last military coup in 1991 - by then a much larger and more confident middle class resisted attempts by the generals to hold on to power, forcing the king to intervene, and allow stronger democratic roots to grow.

Then the Asian economic crisis of 1997 prompted another re-think and led to the constitution of that year, designed to promote modern party politics, for the first time based on policies and personalities.

It was in this new environment that Thaksin Shinawatra thrived. A self-made billionaire, he dazzled Thais with his can-do philosophy, and won over the rural majority with his populist anti-poverty policies. No other politician in Thai history has matched his vote-winning skills.



After his first election victory five years ago, everyone rallied round him, convinced his ability to get rich would rub off on the rest of the country.

The king is highly revered in Thailand

That there was large-scale corruption and cronyism under Mr Thaksin not disputed but that was true of previous administrations. The irrepressible Mr Thaksin, though, went further.

He meddled with the simmering conflict in the Muslim south, putting it under the authority of the police, instead of the army. The result was a disaster and five years later more than 1,500 have died and the central government has lost control of the region.

Mr Thaksin declared a war on drugs, giving police-led death squads licence to kill any suspected dealers. An estimated 2,000 died in that operation.

But worst of all, he ignored pleas from the king to moderate his policies. Instead he re-shuffled key military and civil service positions to try to eclipse the old royalist elite.

Political turmoil

When he managed to sell his family business in January

without paying a penny of tax, the middle class in Bangkok rose up. Their stubborn resistance, resulting in a boycotted election in April, gave the old elite their excuse.

The harmony upheld by the king for more than half a century had been shattered. Even worse, the ailing monarch was clearly distressed by it - and with him, the rest of the population began to yearn for an end to the political turmoil.

There is no shortage of people here who still feel strong affection for the ousted prime minister. He was the first to shape policies specifically aimed at the poor. But many of them also say that what has happened is perhaps for the best, otherwise Thailand would have continued to be divided over his leadership, they say, and that would be intolerable.

The new military rulers offer the same justification for their takeover.

They reject the idea that democracy, the prospect of elections in two months time, might be the best means of resolving those differences. An uncomfortable rift between a populist prime minister and a traditional elite has instead been swiftly resolved, at gunpoint.

It may take months or years to fashion another constitution, and it may in the end be no better than the one the soldiers have just torn up. No matter, harmony has been restored - just look at the flower-draped tanks in central Bangkok - it's almost a point of pride.

Only in Thailand, they say, could a military coup this cheerful and this peaceful take place.

From Our Own Correspondent will be broadcast on Saturday, 23 September, 2006 at 1130 BST on BBC Radio 4. Please check the [programme schedules](#) for World Service transmission times.

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Profile: Thai coup leader

The leader of the coup in Thailand, Gen Sonthi Boonyaratglin, has made his mark in recent months with some very public disagreements with the man he has overthrown, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.



Gen Sonthi is the first Muslim to be commander-in-chief

Appointed commander-in-chief last year, Gen Sonthi is known to be close to the country's King, Bhumibol Adulyadej, and has been seen as an unofficial spokesman for the monarch.

After parliamentary elections in April, which were later annulled because of concerns about their legitimacy, he said that King Bhumibol was "saddened" by the situation.

Gen Sonthi, 59, graduated from Chulachomkiao Royal Military Academy in 1969 and was commissioned to the Royal Army Infantry Corps.

A decorated combat veteran, he headed several top Thai army units including the elite Special Warfare Command.

Muslim insurgency

Gen Sonthi was appointed commander-in-chief last year, the first member of Thailand's Muslim minority to hold the position.

The move was seen as an attempt by the government to curb an Islamist insurgency in the south of the country which has killed more than 1,400 people in the last two-and-a-half years.

His first major spat with the government came when his proposal for talks with the militants was rejected.

And when the political crisis blew up earlier this year, with the opposition Democrat Party boycotting elections amid claims that Mr Thaksin was abusing his power, Gen Sonthi voiced his - and the king's - concerns.

"The country's problem, which originated some time ago and has prevailed until now, has saddened his majesty, which has

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upset and worried me," he was quoted by local media as saying.

"As a soldier of his majesty, I would like to help him relieve his worry and the army will adhere strictly to whatever advice he gives us."

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Profile: Thaksin Shinawatra

Thaksin Shinawatra became the first prime minister in Thailand's history to lead an elected government through a full four-year term in office.



Mr Thaksin's health and economic policies pleased rural voters

Eighteen months later he was out of office after a military coup ousted him as he prepared to give a speech in New York to the United Nations.

According to his opponents - who highlighted his intolerance of criticism and his failure to end separatist violence in the country's south - his fall can be traced back to his family's decision at the start of 2006 to sell its shares in one of Thailand's biggest telecom groups, Shin Corp.

The sale, which netted family members and others \$1.9bn, angered many urban Thais, who complained that the family avoided paying tax and passed control of an important national asset to Singaporean investors.

With calls mounting for him to resign over the issue and large-scale street protests, Mr Thaksin called a snap general election for April, effectively telling opponents to "put up or shut up".

But main opposition parties boycotted the polls and many voters chose to register a "no vote". Several unopposed ruling party candidates failed to achieve the 20% of votes needed to become MPs, leaving parliament unable to convene.

Faced with the threat of further protests, Mr Thaksin said he would step down. He did for a few weeks, but returned to office in May ahead of a re-run of April's elections later in the year.

Following months of political uncertainty, Thai army chief Sonthi Boonyaratglin led a coup in September which stripped Mr Thaksin's government of all powers.

Former policeman

Born in 1949 in the northern city of Chiang Mai, Mr Thaksin

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started his career as a police officer. In 1973, he received a government scholarship to study for a masters degree in criminal justice in the United States.

When he returned he went into business, and during the late 1980s began building a telecommunications empire, helped by cornering state monopolies.

He founded his Thai Rak Thai (Thai Loves Thai party) in 1998, and its rapid emergence transformed Thai politics.



Protests continued in Bangkok in the run-up to April 2006 polls

Mr Thaksin swept into office in 2001, soundly defeating the old guard from the Democrat Party.

Poorer voters liked his offers of cheap medical care and debt relief, his nationalist platform and his contempt for the "Bangkok elite".

But big business also liked him for his CEO style of government and his "Taksinomics" policies which created a new boom in the country where the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s began.

Mr Thaksin also won support for his handling of the tsunami relief effort after the 2004 Indian Ocean disaster, which devastated parts of south-western Thailand.

Overcoming criticism

But other things were not so easy.

He had to face the fallout from his government's suppression of news of an outbreak of bird flu, as well as continuing criticism over his methods of stamping out crime.

The violent deaths of more than 2,500 people during a crackdown on drugs ordered by Mr Thaksin in 2003 did not affect his public support, neither did an earlier finding by Thailand's Corruption Commission that he had failed to declare all of his wealth.



Mr Thaksin has struggled to handle the insurgency in the south

He even weathered criticism over the government's handling of the upsurge in violence in the largely Muslim south, where more than 1,000 people have died since an insurgency began in early 2004.

Each time Mr Thaksin appeared to ride out the storm, his backing among his key supporters - Thailand's rural voters -

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apparently unscathed.

But the sale of Shin Corp fuelled an already active opposition, creating a political storm that has proved to be a very rocky ride for Mr Thaksin.

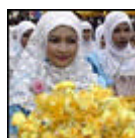
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Thai coup chiefs seek civilian PM

The leaders of Thailand's military coup have been discussing the appointment of a new civilian PM.

The coup leaders have promised within two weeks to find a replacement for Thaksin Shinawatra, ousted in a bloodless coup on Tuesday.

Thailand's king has given his backing to the coup in a TV ceremony that saw coup leader Gen Sonthi

Boonyaratglin kneeling before a royal portrait.

Soldiers have been ordered to show a positive face to the public by smiling.

Army radio told the troops they should be friendly and courteous.

Tanks and soldiers have been stationed on the streets of Bangkok since the overthrow.

Fresh elections

Mr Thaksin was at the UN General Assembly in New York when he was toppled in a bloodless coup on Tuesday.

Dozens of pro-democracy activists held the first protest rally since his overthrow in Bangkok on Saturday.

The gathering, outside an upmarket shopping centre, was illegal under martial law but ended without incident.

The new leadership has drawn criticism from rights groups for banning all political meetings and assuming legislative duties in the absence of a parliament.



Gen Sonthi has said the monarch supports his intervention

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It has also blocked broadcasts it deems harmful, and has threatened to shut down media that violate the new restrictions.

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Gen Sonthi has said he will hand over power to an interim civilian head in two weeks and a new election for prime minister can be held by October next year.

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Leadership candidates

Military chiefs met on Saturday to discuss possible candidates for the office of prime minister.

They are expected to provide a shortlist including leading economists and judges to King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who will name a new leader on Wednesday.

The former head of the World Trade Organisation, Supachai Panitchpakdi, is among the front-runners for the job, reports say.

Mr Panitchpakdi is now chairman of the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

Another candidate for PM is said to be Pridiyathorn Devakula, the head of the central bank.

The coup followed months of growing tension in Thailand, with protests against Mr Thaksin and a general election which was annulled due to concerns about its legitimacy.

Gen Sonthi has said he was acting in line with the wishes of the Thai people, accusing the old government of corruption and fostering divisions in the country.

Television footage has been released of a royal statement endorsing the coup, confirming the coup leaders' claims that they had the king's backing.

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Thai king remains centre stage

By Kate McGeown
BBC News, Bangkok

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Throughout every twist and turn in Thailand's recent political history, there has been one constant figure.

King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who has been on the Thai throne for 60 years, is revered across the nation, with some people even seeing him as a virtual god.

Officially his power to influence political events is limited. But in practice he yields immense power, due to the high respect in which he is held.

That is why many Thai analysts are saying he must have at least been in favour of the coup on Tuesday night, which toppled Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

"The role of the king was critical in this crisis," said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a professor of political science at Chulalongkorn University.

"He is widely seen as having implicitly endorsed the coup."

Sulak Siwalak, a well-known social critic, went further. "Without his involvement, the coup would have been impossible," he said.

The palace has made no direct comment since the takeover took place.

The only statement relating to the king was made by the coup leaders, in a televised announcement stating that the king endorsed General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin as the head of the temporary government.

But sometimes silence speaks volumes - and while there is little evidence that the king



Thai state TV says the revered king endorsed the coup

“ People liked Thaksin, but they love the king ”

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was directly involved in the coup, there are plenty of clues to suggest he at least tacitly approved of Tuesday night's events.

Prof Thitinan Pongsudhirak,
Chulalongkorn University

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The generals who led the coup said they were acting in defence of the king, and even wore yellow armbands signalling their loyalty to the crown. Gen Sonthi also went to speak to the palace soon after taking over.

According to Prof Thitinan, the exact role that the king played is unclear.

"He did not initiate the coup - it was the military that did that," he said. But he added: "No coup would succeed without the king's consent."

Skilful intervention

If the king was indeed linked in some way with the coup, it is not the first time he has intervened in Thailand's often turbulent political history.

One of the most enduring images of his reign is when he ended street violence in 1992 with a few quiet words to the two main rivals, who were kneeling side-by-side at his feet.

Earlier this year he influenced the country's courts to annul the controversial poll in April, by describing the situation as a "mess".

But King Bhumibol is careful never to get too openly involved in Thailand's politics. Often a mere nod or a brief TV appearance is enough to put his point across.

"He's very skilful," said Sulak Siwalak. "He never becomes obviously involved. If this coup goes wrong, Sonthi will get the blame, but whatever happens, the king will only get praise."



“ Thaksin was so successful he felt no one else would outsmart him - I think that was his undoing ”

Sulak Siwalak, social critic

Prof Thitinan said he believed the king allowed the coup to take place as it was the best option available.

"What we were heading for otherwise was violence in the streets," he added, citing the turbulent events of the last few months, such as the controversial elections in April, the street protests against Mr Thaksin and the ongoing political uncertainty.

'Aloof and selfless'

But another reason the coup took place is undoubtedly because of the growing gulf between the monarchy and the prime minister.

"This coup was nothing short of Thaksin versus the king," said Prof Thitinan.

The two men are very different - the king aloof and selfless, the prime minister populist and often seen as arrogant.

"The king spent four decades to win the hearts and minds of people, quietly doing many public works. Thaksin tried to do it in four years, through populist handouts," said Prof Thitinan.

"People liked Thaksin, but they love the king," he added.

In recent months, the prime minister has angered the palace in several ways, most notably during the king's 60th anniversary in July, when he was accused of trying to seek attention by greeting guests before they met the royal family.



The 60th anniversary of the king's accession in June drew huge crowds

He has also faced a growing battle with one of the king's closest aides, retired General Prem Tinsulanonda.

In July, when the prime minister accused a "highly influential person" of attempting to overthrow the government, many analysts assumed he was talking about Gen Prem.

In return Gen Prem told a group of Thai army cadets that their first loyalty was to the king.

The antagonism grew, but despite the national esteem in which people view the king, the prime minister remained firm.

"Thaksin was so successful - he felt no one else would outsmart him," said Sulak Siwalak. "I think this was his undoing.

"He used his money and power, but didn't realise the palace is more subtle than that, and has a lot of quiet power."

In the battle between the two camps, there could only be one winner - the quiet but enormously influential 78-year-old monarch.

Whether King Bhumibol had any connection to the coup or not, he has survived Mr Thaksin as he has survived many

other prime ministers, governments and constitutions.

Thailand may be shrouded in uncertainty right now, but the constant figure they have come to love and trust is still in place, as strong as ever.

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Surreal scenes on streets of Bangkok

By [Kate McGeown](#)
BBC News, Bangkok

On the streets of Bangkok, people were bewildered. It was the middle of the night, yet soldiers and tanks were out in force, and change was in the air.

Many streets were completely deserted, but in others small crowds gathered, with everyone asking the same, simple question: "What's happening?"



Most of the people on the streets appear to support the coup d'etat

Coup rumours were circulating for hours before anything was confirmed, but with international news channels off the air and Thai stations playing nothing but images of the royal family, few people knew for sure what was going on.

"I am interested in knowing what's happening, and that's why I am here," said one street vendor, making her way to the tanks surrounding Government House.

"It's the first time in my life that I saw a tank," she said excitedly.

Photo opportunity

Others were more nervous. One man clammed up as soon as I told him I was a journalist, saying he was too scared of what was happening to make any comments.

But overall the mood was amazingly calm, considering that a coup had just taken place to oust the country's charismatic leader, Thaksin Shinawatra.

The soldiers posted around the city waved and smiled at people passing by, even posing with local people for photographs next to their tanks.



“ To see this is a once in a lifetime opportunity ”

Jannick Bondrop, Danish tourist

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Supporters of the coup cheered, waving national flags and shouting "Thaksin out". Even local tourists joined in, treating the evening's events as an extra, unexpected photo opportunity.

"I found out about this when my parents rang and told me," said Danish tourist Jannick Bondrop. "They were worried for me, but I'm not afraid. To see this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

Rural hinterland

Despite the relaxed atmosphere, the soldiers were in no mood to talk about why they had suddenly stationed themselves around the city.

"We don't know why we've been ordered here," said one soldier, who would not give his name. "I can't say anything else - we've been told to say nothing."

Most of the people on the streets appear to be supporters of the coup.

“ **Thaksin was especially good for the poorer people of Thailand** ”

"I'm glad the military has come to control the situation. Thaksin has caused problems for this country," said Wanchai Sithikorn, a local businessman, echoing a common view among those milling around Government House.

Mr Samat, taxi driver

This is hardly surprising, as the country has long been divided into the mainly pro-Thaksin rural population and the anti-Thaksin urban elite.

One lone Thaksin supporter I spoke to, taxi driver Mr Samat, said: "I like Thaksin's policies because he has done many good things for this country that other prime ministers didn't do.

"He was especially good for the poorer people of Thailand."

With all the accusations and anger against Mr Thaksin in Bangkok, the coup is likely to be welcomed by the majority of the city.

But the news is likely to be taken entirely differently in the rural hinterland - and only time will tell whether Mr Thaksin is really gone from Thailand's political scene for good.

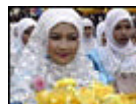
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Views from Thailand on coup

Three Britons who have been living in Thailand for several years describe the reactions around them as Tuesday's coup unfolded.

ROBIN GRIFFITHS, MISSIONARY, ONGSIT, KANCHANABURI PROVINCE

We have lived through about ten different coups since we moved to Thailand in 1973.

We are about 160 miles (260km) north-west of Bangkok in Kanchanaburi province.

Mr Thaksin had a lot of support around here, basically because of the handouts he gave the village people. They were giving out rice and free mobile phones to schoolchildren.

This was before the April elections, although it's been going on since then too.

But people were beginning to see through it.

One of our neighbours said recently: "We're not as stupid as he thinks we are. He's not going to bribe me with his giveaways". But two years ago, this man was a big Thaksin supporter.

I've spoken to a few people here. Many are ambivalent - not that bothered.

One of our neighbours came round at midday and hadn't heard about it at all. He is normally someone who's very clued up about things, but there hasn't been much on the local media.

He was quite suprised - but not that surprised. A lot of people have been expecting this to happen.



“ The urban elite won't tolerate another military dictatorship ”

It may take a bit longer than two weeks to put a new Prime Minister in. I've heard that this general in charge is a Muslim,



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which will go down well with the population in the south.

I think we will be back to a democratic government within a year.

The army knows the urban elite won't tolerate another absolute military dictatorship again, because they are more politically aware than they used to be.

ALEXANDER STARKEY, FINANCE MANAGER, KOH SAMUI

I haven't met anyone who hasn't been smiling today. Everyone came to work happy.

None of us is worried here, really. And a lot of people got a holiday today.

I can't see any chance of violence, because Mr Thaksin had so little support.

It all comes back to the way he sold his Shin Corp shares and avoided paying tax.

It all happened so quickly because I think the army thought Thaksin was planning something from abroad. He had been putting his own Thai Rak Thai party supporters in top positions in the army.

The elections earlier this year were a joke. I guess the coup leaders didn't believe it was going to be worth having the elections with Thaksin pulling the strings again.

It's going to be hard for this general to pick someone to lead who's going to be perfect in two weeks.

But the new person can't do much worse than Mr Thaksin. He's done nothing for the Thai people recently.

He hasn't been fair on the people, so why should they be fair on him?

ADAM BROWN, GALLERY OWNER, BANGKOK

I was quite surprised by this. There have been a lot of rumblings over the past few weeks, but no one took it seriously.

It happened very quickly. I was in a place called Koi's - a Japanese restaurant in the main business area of town.



Thai soldiers stand guard in front of the Royal Plaza in Bangkok

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I'd just ordered a drink. I had got half of it, but before the other half arrived I was on the street.

The lights came on in the restaurant and the staff just said "go". There were mutterings about a curfew, a drugs bust. I wandered along the street and other places were still open quite happily.

It will take a few days before the future becomes clearer. It's very calm at the moment. Everyone is waiting to see what will happen in the next 48 hours.

Mr Thaksin was deeply unpopular here in Bangkok.

Many thought that the recent assassination attempt was a stunt by Mr Thaksin himself.

Mr Thaksin's credibility has reached such a point that even if he was telling the truth, no one would believe him.

A Thai woman who works for me came in this morning as normal. She said they all just got drunk when they heard the news! They've been through it all before, but not for a while.

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How Thai media carried coup news

As Thai military leaders orchestrated a coup d'etat on 19 September, BBC Monitoring observed that all Thai terrestrial television stations - channels 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 - had suspended regular broadcasts at about 2200 local time (1500 GMT).



Military announcers read out statements on army Channel 5

In the place of regular programming, the stations began carrying music videos featuring footage of King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

At 2250, all the terrestrial channels showed a written statement from the coup leaders, who called themselves the "administrative reform group".

The group stressed that it had no intention of becoming the administrators of the country.

The statement said: "Now the administrative reform group under the democratic system with the king as the head of state, comprising commanders of the armed forces and the national police bureau, has gained, without any resistance, full control of the situation in Bangkok metropolis and nearby provinces."

The statement also called on Thai citizens to co-operate with the group "for the sake of maintaining peace and order in the country" and apologised "for the inconvenience".

All terrestrial channels featured a senior army announcer reading the script, followed by more music videos featuring the king.

As the TV channels broadcast the message that the armed forces had taken over the country, a spokesman for elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was attending a UN General Assembly meeting in New York, insisted that his government was still in control.

But the news never reached Thailand, as major Thai cable television provider UBC - which carries CNN and BBC as part of a package of Thai and foreign news and entertainment channels - had been off the air since 2330.

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Footage of king

The Royal Thai Army channel (Channel 5) started broadcasting statements about the coup and giving orders in the form of communiques. The military leaders declared 20 September a public holiday.

The channel alternated between screen shots announcing a military takeover, and various statements from the "administrative reform group" read by announcers from the military.

There were repeated broadcasts of an announcement calling on senior civil servants to report to Thai army command on 20 September at 0900 local time, for a meeting to inform them about the reform group's policies.

The army channel also showed footage of King Bhumibol, accompanied by music praising his accomplishments and devotion to development and helping villagers. The images were similar to the short films traditionally shown at Thai movie theatres before the main feature.

An announcer from the channel said that the king had called in the heads of the army, navy, and air force, and the supreme commander to report on the situation at about midnight Bangkok time. It broadcast footage of the military convoy to the palace and the announcer asked viewers to stand by for further announcements.

BBC Monitoring selects and translates news from radio, television, press, news agencies and the internet from 150 countries in more than 70 languages. It is based in Caversham, UK, and has several bureaux abroad.

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