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Prayut calls for calm after Phuket street riots



People inspect the damage at Thalung police station after a night of rioting in which nine cars were torched and 13 others vandalised during a protest against the deaths of two young men. They died after a police pickup truck hit their motorcycle in a police chase. PATTARAPONG CHATPATTARASILL

◆ Protest drama in photos: Page 4

Two probes set up after night of violence

POST REPORTERS

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha yesterday pledged justice would be delivered after the weekend's Phuket riot sparked by the deaths of two young men, as probes were launched to find the facts behind the province's worst street violence in recent years.

Government spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said yesterday Gen Prayut promised fair treatment to the families and the officers involved and insisted the government would not protect wrongdoers.

The prime minister expressed his condolences to the families of the victims who lost their loved ones and urged the public to refrain from damaging property. "The government will ensure fair treatment to all sides, but at this point it will not discuss the details and it will let authorities concerned do their job," he said.

The violence erupted on Saturday night about 11pm following a stand-off lasting several hours at Thalung police station when angry protesters hurled rocks and molotov cocktails into the station compound. Windows were shattered and several cars were burned or vandalised.

Dozens of residents gathered outside the station on Saturday afternoon to protest against the police, after hearing two men had been killed after police chased their motorcycle.

Police say the youngsters' motorcycle had breached a police checkpoint. They gave chase but crashed into the

motorcycle, leading to the men's deaths. One of the victims was identified as Pathomwat Panarak, 22, and the other identified only as a 17-year-old. According to police, Mr Pathomwat had a record of drug abuse while the other was clean.

Police insist the crash was an accident and they found 50 speed pills and about one kilogramme of *krathom*, a mild stimulant, on the men.

But the residents and the victims' families and friends were unconvinced. They accused the police of overreacting and intending to crash the motorcycle which caused deaths.

They turned up at the station and demanded to see a group of four officers involved in the incident.

The four are Pol Lt Suchart Luecha, Pol Snr Sgt Maj Prasai Phuangphol, Pol Lt/Cpl Kanthaphol Khongnukate, and Pol Lt/Cpl Phanuwit Kaewsang. The tension grew when police refused to bring out the four and more people joined the protest.

By evening, the protesters swelled to several hundred and they blocked Thapkasatri Road in front of the station, paralysing traffic in Phuket town. The sound of firecracker explosions were heard and teenagers on motorbikes circled the area.

Further violence broke out when gunshots rang out, apparently from inside the station. The protesters threw rocks and homemade firebombs into the compound, according to witnesses.

Police Region 8 Bureau, which oversees Phuket police, issued an urgent order transferring the four officers out of the province to ease tension, but to no avail. The protesters demanded criminal charges be laid against them.

Troops from the Army Circle 41, led by Maj Gen Thinachai Chindangern, were

deployed at 1am yesterday. Two hours later after negotiations with the army, the protesters agreed to disperse and return for talks with authorities at 9am. The stand-off lasted 15 hours. Fourteen police officers were injured in the attack on the station.

In one-hour talks brokered by Maj Gen Thinachai yesterday, he said the army would set up a joint committee to investigate the incident, and rehabilitation would be provided.

Phuket governor Chmroen Thip-ayapongthada said the inquiry would be completed within 30 days.

The panel, which would also comprise the prosecution, local administration, and the military would establish if the drugs were planted and if the crash was deliberate.

Meanwhile, police spokesman Pol Gen Prawut Thawornisri said he Royal Thai Police would also set up another panel to probe into the four police as to whether they overreacted. The probe would involve the autopsy results of the victims which are expected in a week.

He said police would also check CCTV footage to find those who instigated the crowd into rioting, and take legal action against them.

Thaweesit Panarak, Pathomwat's father, admitted his son was a former drug convict, but he was kept about the speed pills found on his body. "I don't think he had the drugs. And even if he had, the police overreacted," he said.

Suksri Kaentakhian, he mother of the 17-year-old victim, said she would not settle for anything less than criminal charges. "They should be fired from the service and charged. Transferring them out of the area isn't enough," she said.

Rebels reject peace talks in deep South

INTERVIEW: BRN says it wants 'international mediation' to be guaranteed, writes Anthony Davis

The dominant insurgent faction in Thailand's southern separatist conflict emerged last week to reject the Malaysian-led peace talks being held with the Thai government.

However, the hard-line National Revolutionary Front or Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) also signalled its willingness to open substantive negotiations, provided international mediation can be guaranteed.

In a rare opening to independent news media, representatives of the usually secretive BRN stressed repeatedly the party was not involved in the talks hosted by the Malaysian government and views them as a "negative phenomenon".

Initiated in May after months of ground-work, the talks have brought together Thai negotiators headed by recently retired Gen Aksara Kerdphol and an umbrella organisation of several separatist factions known as 'Mara Patani' which Malaysian officials have implied includes representatives of the BRN.

Meetings have raised hopes that common ground might be found in a conflict which since 2004 has left at least 6,500 dead and more than 10,000 wounded in the majority Malay-Muslim provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat and parts of Songkhla. There has even been discussion of setting up possible ceasefire or "safety" zones.

"Let me be very clear about the current peace process: the BRN is categorically not involved," said one BRN official.

"The way in which this process has been set up is flatly rejected by BRN."

But he added the party was not opposed to peace negotiations "provided such talks follow international standards and norms".

In an interview in a regional capital outside Thailand, four officials of the BRN's "Information Department" discussed the party's views on negotiations that might end the bloodshed as well as noting concerns over the extremist ideology of the Islamic State (IS) in the violence-plagued border region.

A spokesman who introduced himself simply as "Yusuf", said the party's senior leadership, a shadowy underground group known as the Dewan Pimpinan Parti or Party Leadership Council, had authorised them to meet a media correspondent familiar with the conflict.

Speaking in Malay, Yusuf said the BRN's rejection of the talks with Mara Patani hinged on several issues.

"There are many aspects of this process that we see as unsettling and many of these things are caused by the fact the process bears no relation to the earlier peace process of 2013," he said.

The talks initiated in 2013 by the Yingluck Shinawatra government had involved the BRN but were halted late that year following the collapse of an attempted Ramadan ceasefire in July and August, and the BRN's issuing of five demands in a YouTube post to which Bangkok has yet to formally respond. These included demands for international mediation, detainee releases, and Bangkok's recognition of the BRN as a liberation — rather than separatist — movement.

Yusuf added the BRN now believes the current process — which involves three other separatist factions based outside Thailand and three individuals claiming to represent the BRN — is beyond repair. He

said it would be better to scrap it in favour of a new initiative which could include separatist parties and southern civil society organisations in addition to the BRN.

But the real sticking point in the BRN's call for renewed dialogue with the government will be its insistence on international mediation.

"We welcome Malaysian involvement in any peace process. But for Malaysia to be acting alone is insufficient," Mr Yusuf said. "There needs to be other international actors involved as, bluntly speaking, we are deeply suspicious of any form of dialogue with the Thai government which does not involve the international community."

"We do not feel this is in any way a peculiar position," he added. "Wherever there is political dialogue [between belligerents], you will find the involvement

“If anyone in the Thai military imagines this might all be over in a few years, I would simply urge them to wait and see.”

YUSUF
BRN SPOKESMAN

of the international community, be it in the shape of other states or international non-governmental organisations. This is entirely normal."

The Thai government has consistently maintained the conflict is an internal matter to which the government is responding with improvements to the justice system and efforts at accelerated economic development in the region. Any suggestion of international intervention will almost certainly remain taboo for Bangkok, not least given a marked decline in violence over the past year and hopes that distrust of the state among local Muslims is waning.

While conceding that violence had dropped, BRN officials rejected the suggestion the insurgency was being weakened by improved counter-insurgency operations and a lack of popular support. They asserted the party was expanding its political campaign both inside southern Thailand and internationally while maintaining military pressure.

"Any decline you see in military operations may be temporary and the party is evolving and growing," they said. "The proof of this is that after the military coup, this government went all out to pressure us, but we remain active. If anyone in the Thai military imagines this might all be over in a few years, I would simply urge them to wait and see."

Referring to the potential attraction of IS-inspired Islamist radicalism in the border region, Mr Yusuf said the BRN projected an ideology that had nothing to do with religious extremism and was "obviously concerned".

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An electrician repairs the wiring inside the Thalang police signboard that were destroyed during the riot. PHOTOS BY PATTARAPONG CHATPATTARASIL

Chase deaths stoke Phuket protest rage



Police survey the damage inflicted on the Thalang station in Phuket during a riot on Saturday night over two men who died after a police vehicle crashed into their motorbike during a police car chase for alleged drug possession.



Youngsters react after the governor and the residents held talks over the riot yesterday.



The charred wreckage of a car, out of several set ablaze by rioters, sits in the police station car park.



Governor Chamroen Thipayapongthada speaks to residents to defuse tension after the riot, promising a probe into the two deaths.



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1 TPO 11th Season Opening Concert

Concerts: 6 November 2015 / 7.00 p.m. / PMH (Pre-Concert Talk 6.15 p.m.)
7 November 2015 / 4.00 p.m. / PMH (Pre-Concert Talk 3.15 p.m.)
Conductor: Gudni A. Emilsson
Soloist: Vince Gnojek, Saxophone
Programs: Thai Traditional Music
Ludwig van Beethoven: Egmont Overture, Op. 84
Alexander Glazunov: Saxophone Concerto in E-flat Major, Op. 109
John Williams: Escapades Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra
Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 3, Op. 55 in E-flat major Eroica



2 Mahler 2 "Resurrection"

Concerts: 13 November 2015 / 7.00 p.m. / PMH (Pre-Concert Talk 6.15 p.m.)
14 November 2015 / 4.00 p.m. / PMH (Pre-Concert Talk 3.15 p.m.)
Conductor: Alfonso Scarano
Soloists: Sooyeon Kim, Soprano
Barbora Polásková, Mezzo Soprano
Mahidol University Choir
Programs: Thai Traditional Music
Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 2 in C minor "Resurrection"

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3 4th Thailand International Piano Competition Finals

Concerts: 20 November 2015 / 7.00 p.m. / PMH (Pre-Concert Talk 6.15 p.m.)
21 November 2015 / 4.00 p.m. / PMH (Pre-Concert Talk 3.15 p.m.)
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