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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2014 • 30 BHT

Military, bureaucrats to run cabinet

Officers make up 11 of 32 executive members

WASSANA NAIJAM
PRADIT RUANGDIT

The Prayuth Chan-ocha cabinet, which came into effect yesterday, is dominated by military officers with the strong support of bureaucrats and technocrats.

Of 32 ministerial members taking up 34 positions, 11 of them are military officers who dominate over ministers such as Transport, Commerce, Interior, Education, Foreign Affairs, Defence and Justice.

However, the National Council of Peace and Order (NCPO) is aware that experienced hands may be needed in the economic portfolio, and is prepared to ask the military to step aside in these cases.

MR Pradyuthorn Devakula, a former deputy prime minister and former finance minister, will take on the role of deputy prime minister overseeing economy.

Meanwhile, Somchai Pao, former deputy secretary-general for finance and former deputy finance minister in the Surayud Chulanont administration, will serve as finance minister, and Naresroj Akkavanee, a senior economist and former commerce minister as energy minister.

In several ministries where military officers take the helm, senior civil servants and technocrats are appointed as deputy ministers to help them.

Wassana Tansil, King Prajeditrakul's Institute deputy secretary general, said deputies would be able to help ministers drawn from the military in the event they are swapped by an issue.

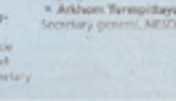
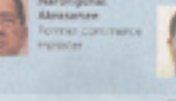
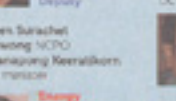
For example, ACM Prajin Jantong is appointed transport minister while Arkhom Termpitayapitak, former secretary-general of the National Economic and Social Development Board, is deputy minister.

"However, no matter who is minister, the direction of the cabinet will be controlled by the NCPO," he said.

In the military ministerial area, some hold posts in the cabinet, the NCPO and the army, such as army chief Gen Chuanthai Sanitkanya who is named commerce minister.

Gen Chuanthai, who is deputy chief of the NCPO's economic affairs, is expected to be made deputy army chief in the annual reshuffle.

GEN PRAYUTH CHAN-OGCHA CABINET



It is believed some cabinet posts have been offered as awards for officers expected to raise key points in the upcoming military reshuffle.

Gen Palloon Khuanthaya is named justice minister. The cabinet post is seen as a consolation prize for the fact he will not be promoted as army chief.

Gen Palloon, head of the NCPO's legal and justice affairs, is expected to be transferred out of the army. He will be appointed deputy permanent secretary for defence.

Deputy army chief Gen Uthairat Sirakul is expected to be named army chief. Gen Uthairat will serve also as a deputy defence minister, which comes as a surprising move. This respected promotion will grant even more power to Gen Uthairat.

Gen Pradyuthorn's close friend Gen Daping Ratanasawan, a retired deputy army chief, is also likely to be disappointed as he is appointed to take control of the National Resources and Environment, regarded as a B-grade minister.

Gen Uthairat Chayasing, the army's deputy chief of staff, is named deputy education minister. Lt Gen Saechai, seen as a close ally to Gen Uthairat, is likely to be made the army's special advisor in the military reshuffle.

Gen Prayuth wanted Gen Saechai to leave the army because he had conflicts with Third Army chief Lt Gen Pracha Chan-ocha, who is Gen Prayuth's former brother-in-law, expected to become assistant army chief in the coming reshuffle.

Gen Prayuth is expected to take his cabinet ministers to attend a meeting in ceremony before the Majesty the King at Siriraj Hospital tomorrow.

Some critics see the military-dominated cabinet as a step to consolidate the junta's power. Half of the National Legislative Assembly, the country's legislature, is made up of military officers and police in those who have close ties with the military.

During his weekly televised address on Friday night, Gen Prayuth said the security situation has not been fully sorted so he needs his fellow officers whom to trust

to help him run the country. A source said Gen Prayuth proposed the Cabinet line-up earlier on.

Former deputy prime minister and key Phru Thai figure Pongthep Thapkiatthana said the image of the new cabinet under Gen Prayuth was not as important as its policy. He urged Gen Prayuth to deliver a policy statement to the NLA so people will know where the country is heading next.

The power brokers: Page B1

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DRUGS Raids nab 23, seize B100m in assets

POST REPORTERS

A joint force of soldiers, police, and Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) officials yesterday raided 49 locations in 13 provinces, arrested 23 drug suspects and seized assets worth about 100 million baht in total.

The assets seized belonged to suspects in Chiang Rai, Phayao, Uttaradit, Nakhon Phanom, Sak, Chaiyaphum, Ayutthaya, Pathum Thani, Nonthaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Phetchaburi, and Bangkok, said Phetphong Chaisaith, secretary-general of the ONCB.

These suspects were found to be in the same drug network connected to the arrest of nine suspects and the seizure of 3 million tablets of methamphetamine in Phetchaburi on March 15-16, he said.

By tracking suspects via the gang's money trail, the authorities found that bank accounts of gang members' relatives were



used to receive money from the drug buyers and to pay for trafficking and distributing costs, said Mr Phetphong.

Buangthai Tingsriyachit, who is wanted in connection with the seizure of 120,000 methamphetamine pills and 1,020

grosses of crystal methamphetamine in Lampang's Thoen district on July 6, 2012, managed the network's money and drug orders, he said.

After receiving orders, three teams headed trafficking — smuggling the drug from

a neighboring country into Thailand, and distributing them to customers, he said.

The first team was responsible for getting the drugs into Thailand.

It handed them over to the second team which acted as go-betweens, handing the drugs to customers in Bangkok, Phetchaburi, Chai Nat, Ratchaburi, and Songkhlo, he said.

The customers of this network were drug addicts, dealers, and prisoners in Ratchaburi provincial prison, he said.

The joint force operations were directed by Pol Gen Pongthep Pranghaves, deputy national police chief in charge of narcotics suppression.

During the raids, the teams used a mobile phone application called "Clear Net" to send video footage of their operations to the ONCB's command center so officials could promptly give instructions, said Mr Phetphong.

Special report

Major drug deals hatched here

Jailed drug dealers still manage to efficiently run drug trading businesses from behind bars.

Reporters Page 3

BALLY

EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCE

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ISLAMIC STATE

US in social media blitz on jihadists

Cyber drive aims to deter youth from IS

The United States has launched a social media offensive against the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda, setting out to win the war of ideas by ridiculing the militants with a mixture of blunt language and sarcasm.

Diplomats and experts are the first to admit that the digital blitz being waged on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube will never be a panacea to combat the jihadis.

But US officials see social media as an increasingly crucial battlefield as they aim to turn young minds in the Muslim world against groups such as the IS and al-Qaeda.

For the past 18 months, US officials have targeted dozens of social network accounts linked to Islamic radicals, posting comments, photos and videos and often engaging in 10-50-tweet exchanges with those which challenge America.

At the US State Department, employees at the Centre for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), created in 2011, manage an Arabic-language Twitter account set up in 2012, an English-language equivalent and a Facebook page, launched this week, called ThinkAgainTurnAway.

A senior US State Department official described the strategy as a kind of cyber guerrilla campaign.

"It is not a panacea, it is not a silver bullet," the official explained. "People say, 'People say, people think this is worthless or they think it is a stupid thing that will make the extremists surrender. It is neither one of those. It is slow, steady, daily engagement pushing back on a daily basis.'

"It is a war of thousands of skirmishes, but no big battles. America likes big battles but it is not — it is like guerrilla warfare," said the official.

The murder of US journalist James Foley, whose execution by IS militants on Aug 19 was released in an internet video, spurred on the new breed of US cyber warriors.

Since Foley's murder, the CSCC has cranked up its Twitter campaign, posting

tributes to the slain reporter, opinion pieces and analyses on radical Islam from across the international media, along with cartoons and graphic photos.

The State Department last week reveled about the death in Syria of IS members, one of whom, Abu Musaba, had recently declared that the group would one day "raise the flag of Allah in the White House".

Another novel congressional militant jihadist who claimed to have killed 22 IS fighters in Iraq.

Another post was more in keeping with the sober diplomatic tone Washington is used to, a photo-montage showing Syria's leader Bashar al-Assad alongside IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in front of a city in ruins.

"Baghdadi and Assad in a race to destroy Syria — don't make it worse," reads a message.

The US managed Twitter accounts are also not squeamish about reproducing images distributed by jihadists depicting mass executions, drawing historic parallels between IS militants and the Nazis.

One post showed armed IS fighters standing over a ditch filled with executed people, alongside another almost identical image of Nazis killing people in similar circumstances.

"Then a Nazi — like Isis — murdered out of intolerance, hatred, evil," read a comment alongside the two images.

Satire is also used to undermine militants, with one retweeted cartoon referring to the "big bucket challenge" — ensuring a participant named as "the civilized world" being drenched by a bucket of blood.

The US officials say the social media offensive is an attempt to "contest space" on social networks which had previously been dominated by Islamist radicals.

"This is an area, a field, where before we came along the adversaries had this space to themselves," the official explained.

"You had English language extremists that could say any kind of poison and there will be very low pushback against them," he added. The aim is to make youths in the West or Muslim nations think twice before going to Syria or Iraq to join IS fighters. AFP



Women and children are evacuated in a military helicopter by Iraqi forces from Amerli, north of Baghdad, on Friday. More than 100,000 people, mostly Turkmen Shia, the small town of Amerli, north of Baghdad, was holding out against repeated attacks by Islamic State fighters until yesterday. REUTERS

Iraqi forces break militant siege of Amerli

BAGHDAD Iraqi forces broke through to the jihadist-besieged town of Amerli yesterday, where thousands of people have been trapped for more than two months with dwindling food and water, officials said.

"Our forces entered Amerli and broke the siege," Iraqi security spokesman Lt Gen. Qassem Atta said.

Talib al-Bajari, an official responsible for a nearby area, also said that the siege of the Turkmen Shia majority town has been broken, as did Nihal al-Bayati, who had been fighting to defend the town against the jihadists.

Iraqi security forces, Shia militiamen and Kurdish peshmerga fighters all took part in the operation, which was launched on Saturday after days of negotiations in which the various forces deployed for the assault and Iraq aircraft carried out strikes against militants.

Thousands of people had been trapped in Amerli since June when jihadist-led militants launched a major offensive that overran chunks of five Iraq provinces, sweeping security forces aside.

While forces from Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region have previously made gains in the north with backing from American

air strikes, the Amerli operation was the first major offensive success for the federal government since the conflict began.

Residents of Amerli faced major shortages of food and water, and were in danger both because of their Shia faith, which jihadists consider heresy, and their resistance to the militants, which has drawn harsh retribution elsewhere.

The United States announced that it carried out three air strikes in the Amerli area, the first time its more than three-week air campaign against jihadists in Iraq has been expanded outside the coast. And aircraft from the United States,

Australia, France and the United Kingdom also dropped humanitarian aid to the town, the Pentagon announced on Saturday.

Western aid for Amerli was slow in coming, however, with the burden of flying supplies and carrying out strikes in the area largely falling to Iraq's fledgling air forces.

Pressure had been mounting from both inside and outside the country for a concerted effort to help Amerli, with the UN urging Iraq warning that people there faced a "possible massacre" by the besieging militants. AFP

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