

National Address of the Prime Minister of Thailand "THAILAND MUST OPEN IN 120 DAYS"

Wednesday 16 June, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

1. *"It has now been just over a month since we returned to a consolidated management of the Covid-19 crisis, which has enabled me to instruct certain actions directly to facilitate the integration of plans among our various teams and committees and quickly solve problems that may naturally arise in the implementation of a such a large undertaking that involves so many different departments... This is the way that we worked when the Covid-19 pandemic started last year... ...It is an arrangement that has enabled us to make some fast progress in negotiations with new suppliers of vaccines. ...We have also secured the supply of more vaccines [with] signed reservation and supply contracts for 105.5 million doses to be delivered this year and putting us ahead of our target for vaccine supplies this year."*

2. *"The time has now come for us to look ahead and set a date for when we can fully open our country and start receiving visitors because re-opening the country is one of the important ways to start reducing the enormous suffering of people who have lost their ability to earn an income. I am, therefore, setting a goal for us to be able to declare Thailand fully open within 120 days from today, and for tourism centres that are ready, to do so even faster. The only exception to these guidelines will be if a truly serious situation develops or seems likely to develop, and we will look at those situations on a case-by-case basis."*

3. *"I know this decision comes with some risk because when we open the country there will be an increase in infections, no matter how good our precautions. But, I think, when we take into consideration the economic needs of people, the time has now come for us to take that calculated risk. The priorities for our country must now advance to the next level."*

4. *"Our national policy must now evolve and we must look on this virus just as we would on the many other diseases that are in the world and with which we must learn to live. We have seen that this virus is not going to go away quickly. We have to come to terms that it will continue to be around in the world and in Thailand for some time. We cannot wait for a time when everyone is fully vaccinated with two shots to open the country or for when the world is free of the virus. We must be ready to live with some risk and just try to keep it at a manageable level, and let people go back to being able to earn a living. That is the policy that I have set."*

Speech Translation

Brothers, sisters, citizens

Today, with the rapid progress of our vaccination programme, I would like to update you on the roadmap ahead for our recovery from the global Covid-19 crisis.

It has now been just over a month since we returned to a consolidated management of the Covid crisis, which has enabled me to instruct certain actions directly to facilitate the integration of plans among our various teams and committees and quickly solve problems that may naturally arise in the implementation of a such a large undertaking that involves so many different departments, while continuing to work on the basis of listening to expert advice and to all ministries, departments and sectors involved. This is the way we worked when the Covid-19 pandemic started last year.

- This arrangement has enabled us to make some fast progress in negotiations with new suppliers of vaccines. At this time, we now have six suppliers of vaccines to our country with which we are working, including Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, as well as Astra-Zeneca, Sinovac and Sinopharm.
- Next to that, we have also been able to secure the supply of more vaccines. Today, we have signed reservation and supply contracts for 105.5 million doses to be delivered this year and putting us ahead of our target for vaccine supplies this year.
- We will continue to seek additional supplies of vaccines for next year.
- Based on our current plans, we will administer an average of around 10 million shots a month from July such that by early October almost 50 million people will have had at least their first shots administered.

The time has now come for us to look ahead and set a date for when we can fully open our country and start receiving visitors because re-opening the country is one of the important ways to start reducing the enormous suffering of people who have lost their ability to earn an income.

I am, therefore, setting a goal for us to be able to declare Thailand fully open within 120 days from today, and for tourism centres that are ready, to do so even faster.

- Visitors to Thailand who are fully vaccinated must be able to enter our country without quarantine or other inconvenient restrictions. And Thais travelling abroad who are fully vaccinated must also be able to return home without confinement in quarantine. Places of work and business must be able to operate normally and without blanket restrictions, and domestic travel, too, must be without blanket restrictions. The only exception to these guidelines will be if a truly serious situation develops or seems likely to develop, and we will look at those situations on a case-by-case basis.
- I would like every department in government and governors of provinces to make all preparations accordingly so that people may return to earning a living once again within that timeframe. As a part of this, I expect the ensuring of the efficient administration of our vaccination programme.
- To get to our target of opening the country in 120 days, we will pilot with Phuket to relax some restrictions and receive visitors using a 'sandbox' model. I have accelerated this matter for it to be considered and decided at next week's Cabinet meeting.
- With this timeframe, I believe that there will be many other countries also relaxing their restrictions on the travel of their citizens and there should be a sufficient number of potential tourists who might be able to come to Thailand.

I know this decision comes with some risk because, when we open the country, there will be an increase in infections, no matter how good our precautions. But, I think, when we take into consideration the economic needs of people, the time has now come for us to take that calculated risk.

The priorities for our country must now advance to the next level.

When we first entered the Covid pandemic, my primary mission was to avoid a massive loss of life in Thailand. Preventing the loss of life is not just about protecting the life of the infected person; it is also about preventing long-term financial catastrophe for a family that may lose a breadwinner, or the everlasting hardship created by the loss of fathers, mothers and grandparents who care for children in our society.

- To date, we have together managed to make our country one of the safest in the world.

- Another great problem that we avoided is the death of people from other common illnesses that require hospital treatment and who would have been crowded out of hospitals by Covid patients and not be able to get their normal care.

My next mission, with the progress of our vaccination programme, is to rapidly try and get Thailand back to operating normally.

Our national policy must now evolve and we must look on this virus just as we would on the many other diseases that are in the world and with which we must learn to live.

- We have seen that this virus is not going to go away quickly. We have to come to terms that it will continue to be around in the world, and in Thailand for some time. We cannot wait for a time when everyone is fully vaccinated with two shots to open the country or for when the world is free of the virus. We must be ready to live with some risk and just try to keep it at a manageable level, and let people go back to being able to earn a living. That is the policy that I have set.

To be able to open our country in 120 days we must do everything possible to ensure that our vaccines are delivered according to the committed schedules, even though we know full well from the cases of other countries that the delivery of vaccines from manufacturers may not be as they commit, with delays and shortfalls in the shipments. But we have to do a good job in managing this.

- In the near term, the top policy priority is for everyone to get, at least, their first shot of a vaccine as fast as possible because that first shot already enormously increases your body's ability to cope with an infection and can save your life.

- The longer-term solution for our country is the fact that we decided to build our own vaccine production. This enables us to keep our population vaccinated for as many years and as long as is necessary.

Today, both Singapore and Taiwan have acknowledged that purchasing vaccines from international companies has been one of their biggest challenges in managing the Covid-19 situation. And they too, like us, have made the decision to manufacture vaccines themselves.

Our own vaccine production is the best long-term solution and it is a solution that we decided upon more than a year ago. It is the right decision, and I thank again, on behalf of the nation, all the various experts who recommended that direction for our country.

As we move forward, we will face new situations when we open the country to visitors. I would like to recognise public health personnel, our village health volunteers, and other related staff for doing their best to be ready for any new challenges that we may face when we open our country, despite the enormous demands placed on them for so long.

I know there are some risks but this is the right direction for Thailand.

Ensuring the rollout of such a massive, nationwide programme of vaccinations within only a few months is a truly historic mission that is unprecedented.

As we move forward in implementing such a large undertaking at such speed and such geographic scope there may be some things may need to be adjusted to meet new conditions as they arise in this constantly evolving situation and there may also be certain errors or inconveniences, and I ask for everyone's understanding.

I send my encouragement to all who have been working tirelessly for more than a year and half. We can all see from our own experiences when we go for vaccinations how public health and other staff put their hearts into their work; their manner, their words and their actions go far beyond just doing a job but are about doing something from a sincere desire to help their fellow citizens protect their lives.

Thank you