

Opening Remarks
by
H.E. Mr. Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
at the delivery of his policy statement
to Thai Ambassadors and Consuls-General
at the Opening Ceremony
of the Meeting of Thai Ambassadors & Consuls-General 2023
Monday, 20 November 2023
09:00 – 10:00 hrs.
Sukhumvit Grand Ballroom, 3rd Floor, JW Marriott Hotel, Bangkok

**Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Executives,
Ambassadors, Consuls-General, Chargé d’Affaires and Acting Consuls-General,**

1. I am very pleased to meet with Ambassadors and Consuls-General from around the world, as well as executives of the Ministry all together and in person for the very first time at this Meeting of Ambassadors and Consuls-General today. Let me underline here and now that we are meeting **to jointly determine the direction and approach for driving Thai foreign policy into the new era, by undertaking “Proactive Diplomacy in a Polarized World”.**

1. Significance of the Meeting

2. The meeting is being convened at a pivotal moment, in the midst of a fluctuating global context that has presented Thai diplomacy with a critical moment for reflection. **How should Thailand best position itself to respond to these changes, to seize opportunities and to manage both domestic and external interests effectively?**

3. Thai foreign policy today **cannot be a matter of “business as usual”. It must be proactive and responsive to the interests of the country and the people in a clear, concrete and tangible manner.**

4. **Proactive Economic Diplomacy** is a key tool in advancing government policies that prioritize economic growth, **the people's well-being**, and the country's advancement. It allows people to be involved and to be supportive of the Ministry's implementation of foreign policy.

5. In the domestic context, there has been a notable increase in public awareness of and interest in foreign affairs. As a consequence, Ambassadors and Consuls-General are required to operate with greater agility and speed. I have full faith in the expertise, capabilities and professionalism of our Ambassadors and Consuls-General in **meeting the challenge to usher in a new era of Thai diplomacy**. All sides must **boost their level of collaboration, both Team Thailand abroad and here at home**.

6. On this occasion, I would like to extend my gratitude and support to the Ambassadors and Consuls-General who have discharged their duties undaunted and selflessly, devoting themselves body and spirit to the well-being and safety of our Thai citizens abroad, in perilous and challenging circumstances, with particular emphasis on the Ambassador in Tel Aviv, the Ambassador in Yangon, the Chargé d'Affaires in Beijing and the Consul-General in Kunming as well as all staff involved.

2. The Changing Global Context

7. As mentioned earlier, this meeting takes place within **an ever-evolving** global context, which I believe all of you are following closely and well aware of.

8. The **key characteristics of the global context today** are:

8.1 **A fragmented and polarized world, both in terms of geopolitics, geo-economics and geo-technology, rife with confrontation and competition, economic decoupling, and supply chain realignment.**

8.2 The international political landscape is **multipolar**, with the United States and China as **main superpowers** in strategic competition. Thailand is under pressure to choose sides, amid the influence of **middle powers**, particularly those from the Indo-Pacific region such as India, Russia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia, which are rising to become important players.

8.3 In the context of this multipolar world, **the multilateral system was one in which previously the United States and Western countries defined the rules and world order, as well as the institutions that were established. That system is being challenged and in decline.**

8.4 Instead, we are witnessing the emergence of **regionalism and minilateralism among countries that share common values**. Such groupings include the G20, Global South, BRICS, GCC and the QUAD. Furthermore, **Thailand has also initiated the establishment of several groups**, including ACD, BIMSTEC and ACMECS, and here, Thailand must play an even greater role in driving cooperation within these frameworks.

8.5 In a multipolar world, **technology is considered to be at the heart of state authority and influence as well as the country's development**. It also impacts international relations, particularly in the transition to a digital economy and green economy, as well as the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

8.6 **Issues that impact foreign policy are becoming more diverse**. This was apparent when I attended the United Nations General Assembly in September. From sustainable development to climate change to technological and digital transformation, to pandemic preparedness and response – all of these issues pose both opportunities and challenges for Thailand.

3. The New Era of Foreign Policy

9. In my view, the most important question for Thai foreign policy to address is the following: **How should Thailand position itself and manage its domestic and external interests effectively, while recognizing that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy.**

10. Moving forward, Thailand must adopt a **proactive and forward-looking foreign policy for the new era that is responsive to domestic interests and major global mega-trends**. This will restore Thai diplomacy and ensure it stays relevant, matters and assumes a prominent position on the international stage, while improving the Thai economy and addressing domestic interests for the Thai people in a tangible manner.

11. Thai foreign policy **must be balanced, advance positions based on principles and take into account national interests**. Thailand must remain friendly and maintain good relations with all groups/countries, refraining from taking sides or being adversarial to any. Joining or participating in various forums must be done in order to find new allies and advance the interests of the nation and the Thai people.

12. To align with government policy, we must prioritize the implementation of a foreign policy to address all dimensions, **undertaken from a narrow orbit to a wider one**, in four levels.

Level 1 starts from our **neighboring countries** – the CLMV group (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam).

- Security, stability and peace within neighboring countries are critical foundations for economic growth in Thailand and the region. Therefore, the **common peace and prosperity of Thailand and its neighboring countries are inextricably linked and dependent on one another**, in accordance with the Prosper-Thy-Neighbour policy.
- We must acknowledge that Thailand's economic size alone is not large enough to attract investment. Therefore, the country must rely on the readiness of neighboring countries and the region as a whole to increase its attractiveness and competitiveness.
- Accordingly, we should prioritize promoting **comprehensive economic connectivity, both in terms of software (regulations/standards) and hardware through infrastructure projects** (bridges, roads, and other means) to further enhance cross-border and transboundary trade and narrow development gaps. **We must expedite the completion of pending infrastructure projects**, including the Thai-Cambodia custom checkpoint in Sa Kaeo province that I visited in September.
- In this regard, I hope that **the meeting between Thai Ambassadors and Consuls-General and Governors of the border provinces** will provide a significant opportunity to jointly promote economic cooperation, particularly in Exclusive Economic Zones and cross-border trade and to address barriers to development in the border areas, including approaches to border security cooperation, leading to tangible results.

Level 2 addresses the **regional and sub-regional level**.

- We are still currently in the Century of Asia with **ASEAN at the center** and a focus of the world.
- The formation of ASEAN arose from an attempt to survive multiple threats, and ASEAN remains the cornerstone of Thai foreign policy.
- Given the present circumstances, in which ASEAN is confronted with internal and external challenges, the organization must **preserve its unity and centrality** in order to ensure that the region remains peaceful, unified and relevant.
- **Thailand should support ASEAN integration** to increase trade between member countries and make the region an attractive location for investment and economic activity, particularly as a single production base.
- **Thailand should support ASEAN and play a leading role (as a neighboring country) in resolving the situation in Myanmar.**

- **Thailand should play a key role in building the foundation for the digital economy in ASEAN** by leading negotiations on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement.
- Furthermore, Thailand should **strengthen partnerships** with other ASEAN member countries on **issues related to ASEAN and the region**, coordinate economic cooperation between **the Greater Mekong Subregion** and ASEAN and drive forward cooperation within the ACMECS framework.

Level 3 is managing relations with great powers.

- **To maintain strategic equilibrium between relations with China and the United States, Thailand must not take sides. This does not mean that Thailand must be equidistant, but rather that it must choose to maintain balanced friendships and Thailand's firm position on issues that are based on clear principles and national interests.**
- We should create foreign policy options that involve constructive interactions and friendships with various poles and countries with potential, **especially other middle powers/groups** such as India, Japan and the European Union, **strategic countries** such as the Republic of Korea and Australia, and **countries with potential** such as Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Mexico. This is to maintain balance and create partnerships to enhance relations and economic opportunities.

Level 4 is Thailand's role in multilateral diplomacy.

- Thailand should highlight its strengths that are in line with **global objectives and shared values**, such as in the area of sustainable development, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and public health, and **participate actively in determining the direction of major international issues**, such as human rights and climate change.
- Multilateral diplomacy is not limited within the framework of the United Nations, but should be extended to other groups/platforms, including ASEAN, ACMECS, BIMSTEC, ACD, APEC, RCEP, BRI and IPEF. Thailand should also enhance its preparedness for its application for membership to the OECD, as well as its engagement and consideration to join BRICS.

4. Foreign Policy Approaches in the New Era

13. Allow me to offer my **views on how we should implement a proactive foreign policy in the new era, through the following four specific approaches;**

- **First, foreign policy begins at home.** Our foreign policy must be consistent with the government's primary policy of economic recovery, that is, **it must be able to respond to the interests of Thailand and its people in a**

tangible way. It must also be able to demonstrate that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs **is playing a key role in the development of our country, and can impact and improve people’s livelihood.**

- **Second, foreign policy must be “proactive”.** We must dare to take initiative and highlight Thailand’s leadership on international issues that are Thailand’s core national interests and that enhance ASEAN’s stability and strength.
- **Third, foreign policy must be “forward-looking”,** by constructively participating in shaping the global agenda, especially on issues that are Thailand’s strengths and recognized internationally. This includes areas such as promoting the SDGs, negotiating the Pandemic Treaty, promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for wider acceptance and implementation and negotiating the Convention on Cybercrime.
- **Fourth, foreign policy must “expand and reach out”** by accessing major powers and countries, both near and far, and by accessing individuals and organizations that have the power to shape the policies of different countries. We should also make use of cooperative frameworks at various levels to maximize benefits for Thailand. Additionally, we should seek new partners and assess the benefits and opportunities for Thailand to join new cooperation frameworks in order to expand our role and advance our interests.

5. The Vision and Outlook for Ambassadors and Consuls-General

14. To implement government policy, I am of the view that Ambassadors and Consuls-General must have **an understanding of foreign policy issues in the current global context, which is highly diverse in terms of politics, economics, society, technology and supply chains.**

15. Your Excellencies must have a **profound understanding of the countries you are posted in** and be able to identify Thailand’s strategic partners, as well as Thailand’s **opportunities and interests** in your countries. You must **be proactive and reach out** to different sectors, both public and private, as well as access the centers of power and individuals who are key to Thailand’s interests.

16. Your Excellencies must be able to **exhibit Thailand’s strengths and attractiveness, lead Thailand to the forefront of the international community and demonstrate to everyone that Thailand matters,** especially on **issues that the government prioritizes and are in our benefit,** such as improving our economy, green economy, digital economy, climate change, clean energy,

sustainable development, public health and pandemic preparedness and response, reducing inequality, and **promoting soft power** that goes beyond Thai food and Thai boxing to include Thai creativity/innovation. You must also be able to **make policy recommendations to the government** on other important issues, such as the imposition of sanctions against third countries (such as Myanmar and Russia), which may affect Thailand and its supply chains.

17. Additionally, **the care and protection of Thai nationals and their interests abroad** is another duty that the government attaches great importance to and which is of public interest. Now that more and more Thais are traveling and working abroad, it is not surprising that there would be more events that affect Thai nationals. Therefore, I ask that our Ambassadors and Consuls-General, who are at the frontline, **to perform your duties as diligently and swiftly as the situation allows**. Even though the situation may be difficult in some cases and you face great pressure and expectations, please always prioritize the interests of Thai nationals and Thailand.

18. Another issue I would like to address is that, in a world where **social media** is widely used and has a wider audience than traditional media, the work of Ambassadors and Consuls-General in this era requires **accurate, precise and timely information, as well as effective tools for communicating/disseminating information**. In some cases, **you may need to take action or respond as appropriate**, such as in the case of assisting/evacuating Thai nationals amid the conflict between Israel and Hamas, where the public has shown great interest, high expectations, and has widely expressed diverse opinions. Therefore, the duty of the Ministry, the Embassies and the Consulates-General is to ensure that the public receives accurate and timely information to ensure correct understanding of the situation and Thailand's stance.

19. **These approaches to advancing proactive foreign policy will also support our proactive "economic diplomacy"**, which is a key government agenda. In the past few months, the Prime Minister has paid visits to over 11 countries and one economic zone and has had meetings with over 60 private companies, especially "big tech" companies, to attract investment to Thailand. In addition, he has instructed that a meeting be held among Ambassadors, Consuls-General and trade and investment attachés to discuss and identify target countries for economic diplomacy. I am certain that Your Excellencies, as the leader of "Team Thailand" in various countries and cities, together with the economic team from both the Ministry of Commerce and the Board of Investment (BOI), will be able to jointly

identify ten key “economic” countries that are in line with changing global trends and Thailand’s interests.

6. Closing Remarks

20. The Meeting of Thai Ambassadors & Consuls-General throughout this week will be a great opportunity for Your Excellencies to learn more about this government’s policies and to exchange information and views with relevant agencies and stakeholders on key government policy issues. This will allow us to jointly plan, prioritize and set timelines and guidelines for implementing a proactive foreign policy. It will serve as a “compass” for our work and that of Team Thailand. This will help place Thailand back on the world’s “radar” with pride, to continue to serve the best interests of the country and its people. Let me assure you that I stand ready and willing to support the Ministry’s missions in all dimensions, be it management, budgetary, personnel or in relation to concrete projects.

21. I thank you.

I hereby open the meeting.
