

Spot Report
Southern Thailand 'Ceasefire' Announced
18 July 2008

At noon on 17 July 2008, Thai TV5 broadcast a video statement of a man claiming to be the leader of a group called Pemerintah Gabungan Pertubuhan Bawah Tanah (Underground Federation Government of Southern Thailand). In the statement, he announced a ceasefire and asked all insurgents to lay down their arms. The man, who did not give his name, was identified by Thai Army Chief General Anoupong Paochinda as Malipeng Khan, an insurgent who was last active in 1987. However, an Army intelligence officer who claimed to have met Malipeng Khan a decade ago said that the man could also be Malipeng's brother Shamsudin, as he had dyed hair and appeared to be wearing a fake moustache in the video.¹

Various news reports have wrongly claimed that the ceasefire began on 14 July 2008. However, the contents of the video translated in ICPVTR indicate that the ceasefire was meant to begin on 17 July.

In the video, the man stated that the ceasefire would start at 12 noon on 17 July 2008, or 14 Rejab 1429 by the Muslim calendar. Additionally, he warned "all parties that if there were to be any other armed activities, kidnapping and any other activities related to it after this stated time, those activities would be regarded as crimes that would be fought against by us," hinting that such rogue elements will be dealt with by the leaders. He also pledged allegiance to the Thai King. The statement was broadcast in Malay and translated into Thai by an interpreter.² In the background of the video was an unidentified blue, green, white and yellow flag.

¹ 'Claim of peace rejected', *The Nation*, 18 July 2008,
http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2008/07/18/headlines/headlines_30078388.php

² 'End of separatism declared', *The Nation*, 17 July 2008,
http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2008/07/17/national/national_30078331.php

The supposed peace deal was brokered by General Chetha Thanajaro, a former Thai Army Chief and defence minister. He is currently the leader of the Ruam Chai Chart Pattana political party, which is a member of the ruling coalition.



'Malipeng Khan' (L) as seen in a screenshot from the video³

Previously all reports suggested that BRN-Coordinate seemed to be the group masterminding attacks in the south. Thus an unknown organisation claiming to be representing the militants/insurgents in the Southern Thailand does not invoke much credibility. The foreign affairs chief of the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), Kasturi Mahkota, said that PULO was looking into the matter and that they were unsure of the identities or affiliation of the three men who appeared in the video. The Nation newspaper said that other separatist leaders were similarly suspicious about the broadcast and expressed doubts that insurgents will adhere to the “truce”.⁴ A security expert at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok also raised questions about the announcement, saying that General Chetha may not have spoken to the right people.⁵ AFP quoted a military official as saying that the announcement was ‘likely to be a joke’ and that ‘General Chetha may be doing this for his own political benefit’.⁶

³ *Ibid*

⁴ ‘Claim of peace rejected’, *The Nation*, 18 July 2008, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2008/07/18/headlines/headlines_30078388.php

⁵ ‘Rebels “agree to ceasefire” in Thai Muslim South’, *Reuters*, 17 July 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/articlePrint?articleId=UKBKK24354720080717>

⁶ ‘Thai politician claims ceasefire brokered with insurgents’, *Channel NewsAsia*, 17 July 2008, http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/360929/1.html

General Chetha stated that he would take sole responsibility for any consequences of the announcement.⁷ However on 18 July 2008, he appeared to have backed out when he said that he was not completely certain of the positions of the men in the video. However, he insisted that the announcement is not a hoax. General Chetha claimed that his associates had assured him that the men were the actual leader of the insurgency.⁸

Despite the 'deal' having been brokered by the leader of a party in the ruling coalition, General Anupong has claimed that the announcement had also taken Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej by surprise. Neither had General Chetha informed the Fourth Army, which is in charge of southern security, of his negotiations. This raises serious questions about the credibility of the ceasefire offer/announcement.⁹

However, if the announcement is genuine and the men in the video actually have some authority over insurgents on the ground, it will be a positive step towards peace in the troubled south.

⁷ 'Army chief skeptical of ceasefire', *Bangkok Post*, 17 July 2008, http://www.bangkokpost.com/180708_News/18Jul2008_news01.php

⁸ 'Claim of peace rejected', *The Nation*, 18 July 2008, http://www.nationmultimedia.com/2008/07/18/headlines/headlines_30078388.php

⁹ 'Army chief skeptical of ceasefire', *Bangkok Post*, 17 July 2008, http://www.bangkokpost.com/180708_News/18Jul2008_news01.php