



Thailand Country Profile



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General Information

Country Name: Kingdom of Thailand

Capital: Bangkok

Geography:

Location	Southeastern Asia, bordering the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, southeast of Burma. Its geographic coordinates are 15 00 N, 100 00 E.
Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> total: 514,000 sq km land: 511,770 sq km water: 2,230 sq km
Land boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> total: 4,863 km border countries: Burma 1,800 km, Cambodia 803 km, Laos 1,754 km, Malaysia 506 km
Coastline	3,219 km
Climate	tropical; rainy, warm, cloudy southwest monsoon (mid-May to September); dry, cool northeast monsoon (November to mid-March); southern isthmus always hot and humid
Terrain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> central plain; Khorat Plateau in the east; mountains elsewhere
Natural resources	tin, rubber, natural gas, tungsten, tantalum, timber, lead, fish, gypsum, lignite, fluorite, arable land
Land use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> arable land: 29.36% permanent crops: 6.46% other: 64.18% (2001)
Irrigated land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 47,490 sq km (1998 est.) Natural hazards: land subsidence in Bangkok area resulting from the depletion of the water table; droughts
Environment - current issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Air pollution from vehicle emissions; water pollution from organic and factory wastes; deforestation; soil erosion; wildlife populations threatened by illegal hunting
Environment - international agreements	A party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Marine Life Conservation, Ozone Layer Protection, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands signed, but not ratified: Law of the Sea
Misc	Controls only land route to Malaysia and Singapore.

People:

Population	65,444,371 note: estimates for this country explicitly take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected (July
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	2005 est.)
Age structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-14 years: 23.9% (male 7,988,529/female 7,633,405) • 15-64 years: 68.6% (male 22,195,625/female 22,731,767) • 65 years and over: 7.5% (male 2,251,112/female 2,643,933) (2005 est.)
Population growth rate	0.87% (2005 est.)
Birth rate	15.7 births/1,000 population (2005 est.)
Death rate	7.02 deaths/1,000 population (2005 est.)
Net migration rate	0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2005 est.)
Sex ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female • under 15 years: 1.05 male(s)/female • 15-64 years: 0.98 male(s)/female • 65 years and over: 0.85 male(s)/female • total population: 0.98 male(s)/female (2005 est.)
Ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thai 75% • Chinese 14% • other 11%
Religions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhism 95% • Muslim 3.8% • Christianity 0.5% • Hinduism 0.1% • other 0.6%
Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thai • English (secondary language of the elite) • ethnic and regional dialects
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 92.6% of total population aged 15 and over can read and write • 94.9% of male and 90.5% aged 15 and over can read and write (2002)
HIV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deaths: 58,000 (2003 est.) • adult prevalence rate: 1.5% (2003 est.) • People living with HIV/AIDS: 570,000 (2003 est.)
Major infectious diseases:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food or waterborne diseases: bacterial diarrhea and hepatitis A • Vector borne diseases: dengue fever, malaria, Japanese encephalitis, and plague are high risks in some locations • Animal contact disease: rabies • Water contact disease: leptospirosis <p>At present, H5N1 avian influenza poses a minimal risk; during outbreaks among birds, rare cases could occur among US personnel who have close contact with infected birds or poultry (2005)</p>

Government:

Government type	Constitutional monarchy
Administrative divisions	76 provinces (or "changwat"); Amnat Charoen, Ang Thong, Buriram, Chachoengsao, Chai Nat, Chaiyaphum, Chanthaburi, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Chon Buri, Chumphon, Kalasin, Kamphaeng Phet, Kanchanaburi, Khon Kaen, Krabi, Krung Thep Mahanakhon (Bangkok), Lampang, Lamphun, Loei, Lop Buri, Mae Hong Son, Maha Sarakham, Mukdahan, Nakhon Nayok, Nakhon Pathom,

	Nakhon Phanom, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nakhon Sawan, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Nan, Narathiwat, Nong Bua Lamphu, Nong Khai, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Pattani, Phangnga, Phatthalung, Phayao, Phetchabun, Phetchaburi, Phichit, Phitsanulok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Phrae, Phuket, Prachin Buri, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Ranong, Ratchaburi, Rayong, Roi Et, Sa Kaeo, Sakon Nakhon, Samut Prakan, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, Sara Buri, Satun, Sing Buri, Sisaket, Songkhla, Sukhothai, Suphan Buri, Surat Thani, Surin, Tak, Trang, Trat, Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani, Uthai Thani, Uttaradit, Yala, Yasothon
Constitution	New constitution signed by King Phumiphon on 11 October 1997
Legal system	Based on civil law system, with influences of common law; has not accepted compulsory International Court of Justice (ICJ) jurisdiction
Suffrage	18 years of age; universal and compulsory
Political parties and leaders:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democrat Party or DP (Prachathipat Party) [Leader: Abhisit Wetchachiwa] • People's Party or PP (Mahachon Party) [Leader: Anek Laothamatas] • Thai Nation Party or TNP (Chat Thai Party) [Leader: Barnharn Silpa-Archa] • Thai Rak Thai Party or TRT [Leader: Thaksin Shinawatra]
Executive branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Chief of state:</i> King Phumiphon Adunyadet (since 9 June 1946) • <i>Head of government:</i> Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (since 9 February 2001) and Deputy Prime Ministers Chaturon Chaisaeng, Chitchai Wannasathi, Phinit Charusombat, Somkit Chatusiphithak, Surakiat Sathianthai; Wisanu Kruangam, Suchai Charoenrattanakhun, Suriya Chungrunruangkit, Suwat Liptapanlop. • <i>Cabinet:</i> Council of Ministers (note: there is also a Privy Council) • <i>Elections:</i> The monarch is hereditary; <p>Prime minister is designated from among the members of the House of Representatives; following national elections for the House of Representatives, the leader of the party that can organize a majority coalition usually is appointed prime minister by the king</p>
Legislative branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bicameral National Assembly or Rathasapha consists of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Senate or Wuthisapha (200 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve six-year terms) and b) The House of Representatives or Sapha Phuthaen Ratsadon (500 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms) • Elections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Senate - next to be held by March 2006 b) House of Representatives - last held 6 February 2005, next to be held in February 2009. Seats by party - Thai Rak Thai 376, Democrat Party 97, Thai Nation Party 25, People's Party 2
Judicial branch	Supreme Court or Sandika (judges appointed by the monarch)
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military branches: Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Navy (includes Royal Thai Marine Corps), Royal Thai Air Force • Military service age and obligation: males serves compulsory military service at 21 years of age; conscript service obligation - 2 years • Military expenditures - percent of GDP: 1.8% (2003)

Economy:

Currency	Baht (1 USD = 39 Baht, Mar 2006)
Economy -	Thailand has a well developed infrastructure, a free-enterprise economy, and

overview	welcomes foreign investment. Thailand has fully recovered from the 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis and was one of East Asia' s best performers in 2004. Increased consumption and investment spending and strong export growth pushed GDP growth up to 6.9% in 2003 and 6.1% in 2004 despite a sluggish global economy. The highly popular government' s expansionist policy, including major support of village economic development, has raised concerns about fiscal discipline and the health of financial institutions. Bangkok has pursued preferential trade agreements with a variety of partners in an effort to boost exports and maintain high growth, and in 2004 began negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement with the US. In late December 2004, a major tsunami took 8,500 lives in Thailand and caused massive destruction of property in the southern provinces of Krabi, Phangnga, and Phuket.
GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$545.8 billion (2005 est.)
Public debt	35.9% of GDP (2005 est.)
Population below poverty line	10% (2004 est.)
Distribution of family income - Gini index	51.1 (2002)
Unemployment rate	1.4% (September 2005)

Transnational Issues:

International disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separatist violence in Thailand' s predominantly Muslim southern provinces prompt border closures and controls with Malaysia to stem separatist activities; • Southeast Asian states have enhanced border surveillance to check the spread of avian flu; • Laos and Thailand pledge to complete demarcation of their boundary in 2005; • Despite continuing border committee talks, significant differences remain with Burma over boundary alignment and the handling of ethnic rebels, refugees, and illegal cross-border activities; • Cambodia and Thailand dispute sections of boundary with missing boundary markers - Cambodia claims Thai encroachments into Cambodian territory and obstructing access to Preah Vihear temple ruins awarded to Cambodia by ICJ decision in 1962; • Ethnic Karens from Burma flee into Thailand to escape fighting between Karen rebels and Burmese troops resulting in Thailand sheltering about 118,000 Burmese refugees in 2004; Karens also protest Thai support for a Burmese hydroelectric dam construction on the Salween River near the border; • Environmentalists in Burma and Thailand remain concerned about China' s construction of hydroelectric dams upstream on the Nujiang/Salween River in Yunnan Province.
Refugees and internally displaced persons	refugees: 118,407 from Burma (2004)
Illicit drugs	A minor producer of opium, heroin, and marijuana; illicit transit point for heroin en route to the international drug market from Burma and Laos; eradication efforts have reduced the area of cannabis cultivation and shifted some production to neighboring countries; opium poppy cultivation has been reduced by eradication

	efforts; also a drug money-laundering center; minor role in amphetamine production for regional consumption; increasing indigenous abuse of methamphetamine
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History

1782	Beginning of the Chakri dynasty under King Rama I, which rules to this present day. The country was known as Siam. New capital of Bangkok founded.
1868-1910	Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Employment of Western advisers to modernise Siam' s administration and commerce. Railway network developed.
1917	Siam becomes ally of Great Britain in World War I.
1932	Bloodless coup against absolute monarch King Prajadhipok. Constitutional monarchy introduced with parliamentary government.
1939	Siam changed its name to Thailand ("Land of the Free").
1941	Japanese forces land. After negotiations Thailand allowed Japanese to advance towards British-controlled Malay Peninsula, Singapore and Burma.
1942	Thailand declared war on Britain and US, but Thai ambassador in Washington refused to deliver declaration to US government.
<i>Post-war uncertainty</i>	
1945	End of World War II. Thailand compelled to return territory it had seized from Laos, Cambodia and Malaya. Exiled King Ananda returned.
1946	King Ananda assassinated.
1947	Military coup by the wartime, pro-Japanese leader Phibun Songkhram. The military retained power until 1973.
1965 onwards	Thailand permitted US to use bases there during the Vietnam War. Thai troops fought in South Vietnam.
<i>Short-lived civilian rule</i>	
1973	Student riots in Bangkok brought about the fall of the military government. Free elections were held but the resulting governments lacked stability.
1976	Military took over again.
1978	New constitution promulgated.
1980	General Prem Tinsulanonda assumed power.
1983	Prem gave up his military position and headed a civilian government. He was re-elected in 1986.
1988	General Chatichai Choonhavan replaced Prem after elections.
1991	the 17th Military coup since 1932. A civilian, Anand Panyarachun, was installed as prime minister.
1992	New elections in March replaced Anand with General Suchinda Kraprayoon. There were demonstrations against him, forcing him to resign. Anand was re-instated temporarily. Elections in September see Chuan Leekpai, leader of the Democratic Party, chosen as prime minister.
1995	Government collapsed. Banharn Silpa-archa, of the Thai Nation party, was elected prime minister.
1996	Accused of corruption, Banharn' s government resigned. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh of the New Aspiration party won elections.
<i>Financial turmoil</i>	
1997	Asian financial crisis: The baht fell sharply against the dollar, leading to bankruptcies and unemployment. The IMF stepped in. Chuan Leekpai becomes prime minister.
1998	Tens of thousands of migrant workers are sent back to their countries of origin. Chuan involved the opposition in his government in order to push through economic reforms.
1999	Economy began to pick up again. Thai media highlight high cost of drug treatments for Aids and HIV. Thailand begins to pressurise drugs companies to find ways to make the drugs cheaper.
2001 January	Election was won by Thaksin Shinawatra of new Thai Love Thai (or Thai Pak Thai) party. Allegations of vote-buying forced partial re-run of poll. Thaksin

	formed a coalition government.
2001 March	A plane which Thaksin was due to board explodes. Police said a bomb was to blame.
2001 June	Prime Minister Thaksin visits Burma to discuss drugs and border tensions. He said relations were now back on track. Within days the Mae Sai-Tachilek border crossing was opened again after clashes between Thai and Burmese troops in February.
2001 August	Thaksin was cleared of assets concealment. A conviction by the Thai Constitutional Court could have meant a five-year ban from politics.
2002 May	Burma closed its border with Thailand after Thai army fires shells into Burma during battle between Burmese army and ethnic Shan rebels. Border was reopened in October.
2003 January	Serious diplomatic upset with Cambodia over comments that Cambodia' s Angkor Wat temple complex was stolen from Thailand. Angry crowds attacked the Thai embassy in the Cambodian capital. More than 500 Thai nationals were evacuated.
2003 February	Controversial crackdown on drugs started; more than 2000 suspects were killed by end of April. Government blamed many killings on criminal gangs; rights groups said extra-judicial killings were encouraged by authorities.
2004 January-March	More than 100 killed in wave of attacks in largely-Muslim south. Government blamed Islamic militants. Martial law imposed.
2004 April	More than 100 suspected Islamic insurgents were killed after launching coordinated dawn attacks on police bases in the south.
2004 October	85 Muslim protesters died, many from suffocation, while they were in army custody following violence at a rally in the south. An enquiry concluded that they were not killed deliberately.
<i>Tsunami disaster</i>	
2004 December	Thousands of people were killed when massive waves, caused by a powerful undersea earthquake off the Indonesian coast, devastated communities on the western coast of southern Thailand, including the tourist resort of Phuket.
2005 March	Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra began a second term in office after his party won a landslide victory in February' s elections.

Human Rights Institution & Treaties

Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC)

As a result of struggles for political reform and democracy, particularly over decades the major social and academic movements in Thailand between 1996 and 1997, the 1997 Constitution was promulgated with the full guarantee of human dignity and all basic rights as well as fundamental freedoms for people.

The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC) was established under Sections 199 and 200 of the Constitution as a mechanism to guarantee the respect for human rights as stipulated therein.

The 11 full-time Commissioners were elected by the Senate from a short list of 22 people with extensive human rights experience, gender balance and pluralistic background. The Commission' s statutory term of office is 6 years, and each Commissioner shall serve for only one term.

International Obligation

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
Status: Accession 1997
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR)
Status: Accession 1999
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including its Optional Protocol
Status: Accession 1985

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
Status: Accession 2003
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), including Optional Protocol on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography
Status: Accession: 1992
- International Labour Standard:
 - Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention - *ratified in 1968*
 - Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention - *ratified in 1968*
 - Forced Labour Convention - *ratified in 1969*
 - Final Articles Revision Convention - *ratified in 1947*
 - Employment Service Convention - *ratified in 1969*
 - Equal Remuneration Convention - *ratified in 1999*
 - Abolition of Penal Sanctions (Indigenous Workers) Convention - *ratified in 1964*
 - Abolition of Forced Labour Convention - *ratified in 1969*
 - Final Articles Revision Convention - *ratified in 1962*
 - Employment Policy Convention - *ratified in 1969*
 - Minimum Age (Underground Work) Convention - *ratified in 1968*
 - Maximum Weight Convention - *ratified in 1969*
 - Minimum Age Convention - *ratified in 2004*
 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention - *ratified in 2001*

For more information, please go to:

<http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/newhvstatusbycountry?OpenView&Start=1&Count=250&Expand=36#36>

<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/profileframeE.htm>

Recent Justice & Peace Issues

[last updated: February 2006]

The immediate cause for the large scale protest on 26 February 2006 was the sale of major stock of Shin Corp, the telecommunication conglomerate founded by the Prime Minister himself.

The sale in January 2006 sparked outrage among many because it was finessed in such a way as to be totally tax free and amounted to putting national assets in foreign hands i.e. a Singapore conglomerate, Temasek Holdings. It was reported that Thaksin had built up his Shin Corp business empire largely on lucrative government concessions.

The demonstration on 26 February 2006 drew up to 100,000 protesters calling for the resignation of the Prime Minister.

The following issues are the backdrop for the political scene in recent years:

A) Restriction on Media

Media reform efforts to establish an independent National Broadcast Commission (NBC) to assign broadcast frequencies and regulate the broadcast sector remained stalled. In 2003, the Supreme Court rejected a selection committee's proposed NBC membership list due to a lack of transparency in the selection process.

Repeated delays in the implementation of the broadcast reforms resulted in attempts by some to establish their own community radio studios and transmitters. Because current broadcast regulations restrict radio frequencies to government entities, these independent community radio stations technically operated outside the law. A 2003 state community radio policy allowed the stations to continue "extra-legal" operations until laws and regulations were amended. By the end of the year, over 1,000 independent community radio broadcast stations were in operation. On 3 September, the Government Public Relations Department (PRD) announced plans to allow 1,500 community radio stations and permit such stations to broadcast 6 minutes of commercials a day but limit them to 30 watts of power, a 30-foot antenna, and a range of 15 to 18 miles. The PRD has attempted to assert its

regulatory control over the community radio stations, citing a 2003 cabinet resolution empowering the department to regulate all radio stations. The PRD, with the approval of the Deputy Prime Minister, attempted to register all community radio stations by the end of the year. Many community radio operators nationwide opposed these efforts. According to press reports, on December 14, approximately 200 members of the National Community Radio Federation threatened to stage a public protest if the PRD's efforts to register all community radio stations went forward. They expressed concerns that, if placed under PRD supervision, ruling government political parties could use the stations as campaign tools. By mid-December, despite PRD warnings that all unlicensed community radio operators would be arrested after February 2005, the PRD had received only approximately 500 applications.

During 2005, there were several court cases in which entities in the Government or those associated with it used libel laws in apparent attempts to suppress media criticism. In June, a criminal court accepted a libel case filed by the Shin Corporation against Ms. Supinya Klangnarong, Secretary General of the NGO Campaign for Popular Media Reform; the small, Thai-language Thai Post newspaper; and Thai Post's three editors. The suit stemmed from a July 2003 Thai Post story^{ri} which Ms. Supinya said that it appeared the Shin Corporation was a major beneficiary of the Prime Minister's policies. The Shin Corporation also filed a \$10 million (400 million baht) civil case against the same defendants. The criminal case was scheduled to begin in July 2005, and the civil case was to follow the criminal case. (For more detail, please refer to UA050727(3).)

In another high-profile case, in 2002, four Constitutional Court judges and a state prosecutor filed a libel suit against Mr. Prasong Soonsiri, a former foreign minister and columnist for the opposition Naew Na newspaper. Prasong had written an article quoting academics who criticized the Court's acquittal of Prime Minister Thaksin in the 2001 asset-concealment case. On 3 December 2003, a criminal court found Prasong not guilty of defaming the judges but guilty of contempt of court by failing to respect the acquittal verdict. Prasong received a 1-year suspended sentence and had to pay a fine of US\$175 (7,000 baht). The verdict was generally seen as a victory for Prasong.

According to US-based Human Rights Watch in December 2005, Thaksin has used a potent combination of state and corporate powers to put political and financial pressure on the media since his office in 2001. This action appears to limit negative reporting from outlets he does not control. The government has restricted media freedom by withholding or threatening to withhold advertising contracts, operating licenses, and work permits from media outlets, and by filing, or having surrogates file, large defamation cases against prominent activists and independent journalists and media organizations.

B) Tension in southern provinces

From January 2004, the tension due to violence and increased security measure led to occasional clashes of the police and the local residents in the southernmost region of the country. The government has in many occasions announced investigation over the alleged abuse, but fail to prosecute.

The alienation of the southern people (in the provinces of Songkhla, Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala), mostly Muslim community, has been the source of decades-old separatist struggle. The violence abated in the 1970s and died down in 1990s - after the government promised to channel more funds into the region and ensure the Muslim community an adequate political representation. In fact, these provinces have failed to capitalize on the economic boom in the country in recent years. Academics say the government has not accommodated the needs of the local community. They also pointed that loan schemes intended to promote development have excluded Muslims.

The government was not sure who to blame for the tensions. Local gangs involved in smuggling and drug trafficking were being blamed by the Prime Minister. On the other hand various officials have blamed Muslim insurgents. As a result, the government initiated a 3-month "War on Drugs" from February through April 2003, during which extra-judicial killings were carried out on 1,300 suspects.

In January 2004, a raid on an army depot signaled a return to violence. Since then there have been frequent incidents in which symbols of authority - including police officers, teachers and Buddhist monks - have been targeted by Muslim gunmen. On 28 April 2004, lightly armed Islamic groups

launched simultaneous attacks on police bases and checkpoints in several districts of Yala, Pattani and Songkhla provinces. As a result, a total of 107 suspected assailants were killed. Both local civil society and international community were concerned with the level of force used by security personnel in the incident.

In July 2005, the government issued an emergency decree on the 3 southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani and parts of the Songkhla. The decree gives authorities sweeping powers to declare a state of emergency, arrest and detain suspects, restrict movement and communication, censor the media, and deny access to the Administrative Court and to redress for victims of abuses by government officials and the security forces.

There have been reliable reports of surveillance and harassment of human rights defenders, particularly those working on issues related to violence in the south. In March 2004, Somchai Neelapaijit, a prominent Muslim human rights lawyer, was abducted in Bangkok and is now presumed dead.

Growing fear and suspicion of the security forces have caused hundreds of Muslims to seek asylum in Malaysia. It was reported that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was in the process of determining the status of 131 Thai Muslims who fled to Malaysia in October 2005.

The latest mutiny was a bomb attack wounding 6 police officers, and 3 villagers on 1 March 2006 in front of the Chanae district administrative offices in Songkhla Province.

Source

The World Factbook

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html> (updated January 10, 2006)
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/chiefs/chiefs176.html>

The Bangkok Post

www.bangkokpost.com

Country reports on Human Rights Practice on Thailand, 2004

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41661.htm>

National Human Rights Commission of Thailand

<http://www.nhrc.or.th>

Database of International Labour Standard

<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/index.htm>

The Constitution of Thailand (English version)

<http://www.ect.go.th/english/laws/constitutioneng.html>

Human Rights Watch

<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/thaila12251.htm>

BBC News

Local source