

News Reporting and News Management on the Issue of Righteousness in Political Behaviors of a Head of the Government: A Case Study of General Surayut Chulanont from the Perspectives of the Thai daily Newspapers from 2006 to 2008

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Abstract

research questions:

1. How do newspapers critique in the political legitimacy, ability of administrate, personality, political behavior of General Surayut Chulanont. (He is privy councilor before prime minister of Thailand)
2. How do newspaper critique /report the information Handle of Gernal Surayut Chulanont in politcal legitimacy, ability of administrate, personality, political behavior.

This qualitative research, through newspaper-documenting research method, aimed to examine political news coverage of the newspaper relating to General Surayut Chulanont on the issues of the righteousness in politics, capabilities in ruling, personalities and behaviors in politics, and to study the handling of political news of General Surayut Chulanont on the issues of the righteousness in politics, capabilities in ruling, personalities and behaviors in politics which surfaced on the newspaper.

The results can be concluded as follow. On the issues of political righteousness, the newspaper criticized that a government head in the democracy system must come from an election in order to have righteousness; claiming heaven's order, and has good governance. The head of state must have righteousness in politics, use power with moral, adhere to the law and order, and have good vision, without committing corruption,

The matters related to the coup on September 19, 2006, the newspaper reported that Politicians did not have courage to act against the coup. King must have moral.

On the issue of handling of political news of General Surayut, newspapers criticized that retorted the critiques. He hurled back at the people who scrutinized him. General Surayut should not have verbally counterattacked. He avoided using silence to win over others. He apologized to the Islamic leaders because he knew that they would forgive him, which brought both agreement and disagreement from the media. General Surayut claimed that he did not violate the law in casing of owning untitled land on the Kao Yai Tieng Hill.

Background and Significance of the Study

Elected government has more righteousness than a government derived from a coup d'état. Righteousness in politics comes from popular consent of the majority, which accepts a political leader as a person who enters politics and leads to position in the legitimate process. He or she can utilize power appropriately and usefully for people in the society. Political righteousness in a democracy system occurs on the base of having mechanisms, which guarantee that government's use of ruling power shall be subjected to check and balance so that the use of power is suitable and meets the needs of people and public interest. Government must follow the political procedure under the regulations and rules of power according to the constitution, which strictly stated so.

On September 19, 2006. General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, the leader of the Council of Administrative Reform under Constitutional Monarchy (CDRM) seized the administrative power from Police Colonel Dr. Thaksin Shinnawatra, the then Prime Minister. Later, General Sonthi requested that General Surayut Chulanont become the Prime Minister with General Sonthi granted the royal command on October 1, 2006. The cabinet of General Surayut consisted of many elderly and retired government officers. The media called this government the "Old Ginger." The Prime Minister himself was perceived as the person who emphasized morals and ethics. However, they worked so slowly that the academic named them "Hermits raising turtles."

In the first period of operating as the Prime Minister, the media slightly criticized the righteousness in taking the position because General Surayut Chulanont used to work as a member of the Privy Council. However, after administering for a period of time, the media criticized on the issue of transparency in administration in many points; for example, on the matters of moral and ethic in owing train bogies and the purchase of land for building a personal house in a monastery land located in the reserved forest area on Kao Yai Tieng Hill in Nakorn Ratchasima Province. The media also criticized on the administrative work as a Prime Minister.

Generally, when politicians are criticized by the media, they look for ways to avoid the criticisms. General Surayut also faced the criticism. Many newspapers condemned the righteousness in entering the power of General Surayut. They also doubted the ability in administering which was attacked by the opposition as allowing subordinators to do many wrong conducts in implementing states' projects. In addition, newspapers criticized the issue of moral and ethics of General Surayut who used to be a member of the Privy Council with clean and honest image before becoming a prime minister.

Most previous literatures studied the roles of the media on politicians and their image. However, there has been little research on news management by the criticized politicians. In this study, the researcher studied the political news reporting of newspapers on the issues of righteousness and honesty of General Surayut Chulanont and the ways he handled the criticisms. Therefore, the research was the way to create a new body of knowledge and to broaden the study on politicians' image.

General Surayut had social capital as an honest person who used to be the Chief Commander of the Army and used to be a member of the Privy Council before

becoming the “Prime Minister.” However, once he stepped up as the Prime Minister, he was criticized by the media and the people in the society as having conducts in the dishonest manner from many issues. The most outstanding issues were the image before becoming the Prime Minister that was contrasted with the image after becoming the prime minister. This contrast led to the problem for this research.

Objective of the Study:

1. To study the political news reporting of newspapers related to General Surayut Chulanont on the issues of political righteousness, the ruling capabilities, and personality and political behaviors
2. To study General Surayut’s handling of the political news on the issues of political righteousness, the ruling capabilities, and personality and political behaviors which appeared on the newspapers.

Research Questions:

1. How did the newspapers report the issues of political righteousness, the ruling capabilities, and personality and political behaviors of General Surayut?
2. How did General Surayut handle the news on the issues of political righteousness, the ruling capabilities, and personality and political behaviors?

Scope of the Study:

In the study entitled “News Reporting and News Management on the Issues of Righteousness in Political Behaviors of a Head of the Government: A Case Study of General Surayut Chulanont from the Perspectives of the Thai Daily Newspapers from 2006 to 2008,” the researcher studied the reporting of political news of two daily newspapers, namely Matichon Daily and Manager Daily.

Definition of Terms:

1. News reporting means the way the Matichon Daily and the Manager Daily presented the information to the public on the issue of:
 - 1.1 Political righteousness which means public acceptance of the government as the leader of the country by believing that what the politicians were doing was right and acceptable
 - 1.2 Characters of General Surayut Chulanont means outstanding characters of General Surayut Chulanont that were presented in the newspapers.
 - 1.3 Ruling Performance means the ways that General Surayut Chulanont used his knowledge and ability to solve the problems of the country effectively which consisted of:
 - The management of uprising in Bangkok
 - The solving of economic and political problems
 - The solving the narcotic problems
 - The solving of the conflicts in the three southern provinces

Research Methodology:

The study entitled “News Reporting and News Management on the Issue of Righteousness in Political Behaviors of a Head of the Government: A Case Study of General Surayut Chulanont from the Perspectives of the Thai daily Newspaper from

2006 to 2008” was a qualitative research using the method in documents research from newspapers which were purposively sampled. The newspapers were two good-quality newspapers that stressed the political news. The newspapers were recognized as presenting hard news. They were Matichon Daily and Manager Daily.

Research Instrument:

This research was a qualitative research, so the researcher had been careful and had accuracy as well as trustworthiness. To prevent bias from conducting and collecting the data, the researcher had the process to prove the validity and the reliability of instrument as follows.

Validity:

The researcher ensured content validity by checking the language (words, messages, phrases, and sentences) that each newspaper presented. The researcher also checked the comprehensiveness of the variables that measured the political righteousness, ruling capabilities, personality, and political behaviors

Reliability:

The researcher made certain the reliability of the data by conducting the data triangulation by matching both newspapers to verify whether the data were alike. The researcher also checked with other literatures such as research and theses to make sure that the data were accurate.

Units of Analysis:

Units in analyzing in this research consisted of words, messages, and phrases that appeared in the news, leads, articles, news scoops which had content related to political matters on the issues of political righteousness, ruling capabilities, personality and political behaviors of General Surayut Chulanont which were presented in the newspapers.

Data Analysis:

The researcher took the data gained from studying the two newspapers to analyze by perusing the messages. After that, the messages, phrases, sentences were identified and reduced. Later, the data were categorized and described qualitatively.

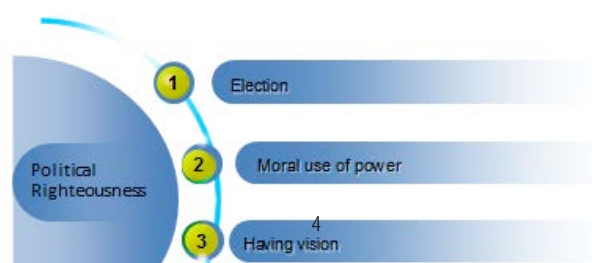
Result of the Study:

The study entitled “News Reporting and News Management on the Issue of Righteousness in Political Behaviors of a Head of the Government: A Case Study of General Surayut Chulanont from the Perspectives of the Thai daily Newspaper from 2006 to 2008” revealed results as described in the following sections:

1. Political Righteousness

The study result of political righteousness are as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



1.1 A Leader must be from an election

From the study of political news on the issue that a leader must be from an election, it was found that politicians in the democracy system must be from a fair election. It is the election according to the highest constitution. The political leader that won the election is accepted by the public and has more righteousness than the political leader who did not win an election.

1.2 Political leader must use power morally

From the analysis of the political news on the issue that political leader must use power morally, it was found that when a political leader gained power from the fair election, he/she must use power morally. This means that he/she must not violate the law and does not outrageously use the power that is against lawful principles.

1.3 Political Leader must not violate the law

The politician with righteousness must use state power as intention of the law. In the mean time, politician must be a person who accentuates sacrifice of personal interest for public interest. They intend to serve the nation and maintain the democracy system and must use law to be the base for administering the country.

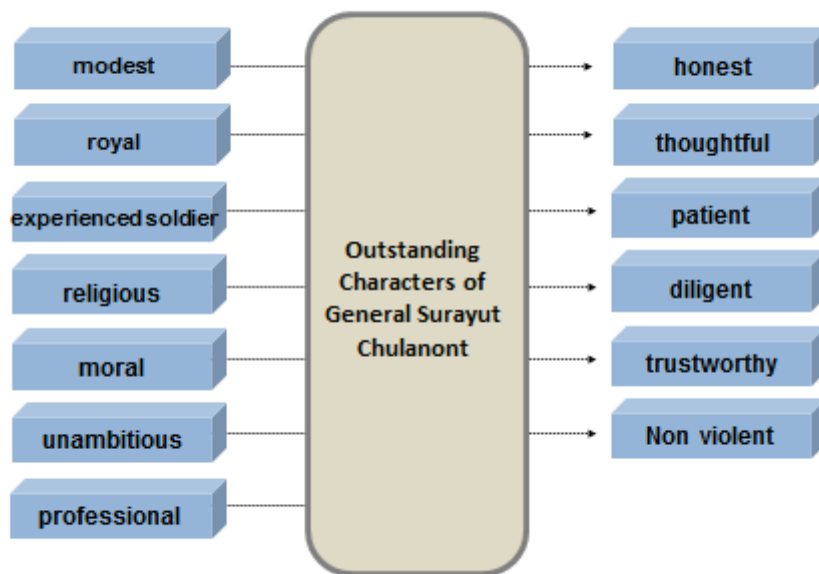
1.4 A Leader must have visions

From the analysis of political news on the issue that a political leader must have vision, it could be concluded that a legitimate government must have visions and ability in administering the country. They must make the people sure that they can lead the country to advancements and will not make the people feel that the government is unreliable causing them to depend on superstition.

2. Outstanding Characters of General Surayut Chulanont

Figure 2 shows outstanding characters of General Surayut Chulanont presented in the newspapers which includes being modest, loyal, diligent, generous, honest, thoughtful, patient, non-violent, professional soldier, unambitious, moral, religious, experienced, and trustworthy.

Figure 2.



From the analysis of the outstanding characters of General Surayut Chulanont, the Prime Minister, it was found that columnists of Matichon Daily and Manager Daily mentioned him as honest from such phrases as “clean hands”, “people could pay highly respect without doubt”, “he has moral and friendship”, he is a clean-hand gentleman.”

2.1 Polite

General Surayut Chulanont has the image of a gentleman. He is modest and have mercy. He is not aggressive.

2.2 Firm

General Surayut Chulanont is patient. He used patience to solve problems of the country. He was not easily swayed by distracters no matter how many.

2.3 Unambitious

General Surayut Chulanont was not ambitious. He understood the word ‘enough.’ Therefore, he did not have thirst for power. He was easy going. He did not have ambition and was a politician who was not addicted to power.

2.4 Decent

General Surayut Chulanont was the person whom General Prem Tinnasulanont praised as the best man who had moral and friendship. He was one of the best men. He was optimistic and has characters of the moral practitioner with good mind.

2.5 Knowledgeable and competent

General Surayut Chulanont had qualification in knowledge and experience in government and politics as General Prem Tinnasulanont said that he knew a lot.

2.6 Democratic

From the analysis on the issue of being democratic of General Surayut Chulanont, the prime minister was found to be praised by columnists as the military personnel with democratic mind among the odor of coup and revolution. He was the prime minister with no intention to hold on to power. He became prime minister only temporarily.

2.7 Being modest

On the issue of being modest, it was found that he was modest and humble, but not weak. He was self-effacing on the outside but strong inside. He was modest both in the verbal and action, which is good for a leader.

2.8 The issue of loyalty to the monarchy

On the issue of being loyal to the monarch, it was found that General Surayut was admired as a person who had high loyalty to the monarchy.

2.9 General Surayut had good intention. He did not give up easily.

2.10 He was full of fine objectives and being stern.

2.11 Keeping one's words

General Surayut was trustworthy. He was never jealous. He meant what he said. He was straightforward and being a gentleman.

2.12 Being circumspect

General Surayut was prudent. He kept his feeling. He never showed fright easily. No matter what happened, he did not show his contempt. He was not a person who always complained. He was a calm and collect person.

2.13 Being non-violent

General Surayut was a person who solved problem with soft manners. He did not desire war. He had peaceful thinking. He wanted harmony. He was a god of compromising.

2.14 Being reclusive and religious

General Surayut was a leader who led Thai people to feel the person who had a reclusive life style according to the role model of a religious person in Buddhism.

3. Ruling Capabilities and Performance

From the study on the issue of ruling capabilities and performance of General Surayut Chulanont, four sub issues were found in the news reports of newspapers:

3.1 The Handling of Unrest problems in Bangkok

From the reports of newspapers Matichon and Manager, the researcher divided the content of the criticisms by columnists into two topics, namely 1) General Surayut failed to solve the problem and 2) General Surayut lacked efficiency in communication as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3

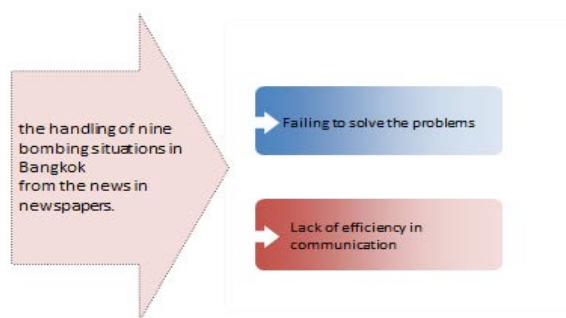


Figure 3 shows the handling of nine bombing situations in Bangkok from the news in newspapers.

➤ **Failing to solve the problems**

From the analysis of news reports of the Matichon and Manager Daily on the issue of performance and ruling capabilities, it was found that he failed to solve the problem. There were no suspects arrested from the nine bombing situations in Bangkok from late 2006 to early 2008.

➤ **Lack of efficiency in communication**

General Surayut Chulanont, the prime minister lacked the dexterity in communication. He could not inform useful news from the government to people. When compared with Police Colonel Thaksin Shinnawattra, it was found that Thaksin had more communication efficiency.

3.2 Solving the economic problems

Columnists criticized the way General Surayut tackled economic problems in three matters: failure in managing the economy, cause of economic slow-down, and obsessing in corruption, disbelief of sufficiency economy, doing what should not have been done, emergence of social problems, Bank of Thailand had wrong policy as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4

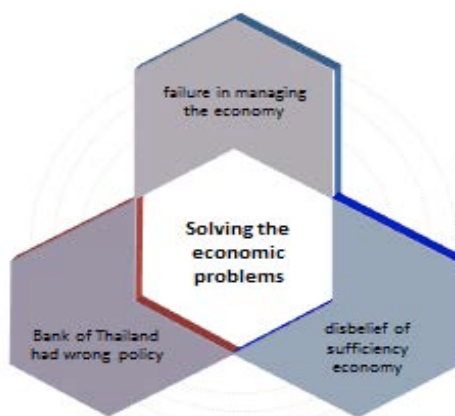


Figure 4 show of solutions

criticisms of economic

problems of General Surayut Chulanont from the news reports in the newspapers.

The criticisms of General Surayut's solving of economic problem can be elaborated as follow.

➤ Failure in solving economic problem

The government of General Surayut managed the economy without efficiency in many causes. The main cause was that his cabinet members in economics lacked expertise and experience. They also lacked visions in administering the country.

➤ General Surayut did not believe in sufficiency economy

General Surayut talked with people in the society about managing the economy which followed the sufficiency economy. On the contrary, he and the minister of finance did the opposite,

➤ The governor of the Bank of Thailand did not understand the term sufficiency economy.

They could not explain to other countries. The government was still confused in the direction of the solutions of the problem. There was only philosophy. General Surayut did not believe in sufficiency economy, and it was disorderly mentioned.

3.3 Solving the political problems

From the analysis on the issue of solving political problems, Matichon Daily and Manager Daily criticized that General Surayut lacked three elements that are efficiency, dexterity in communication, and to not pay attention to the grassroots as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

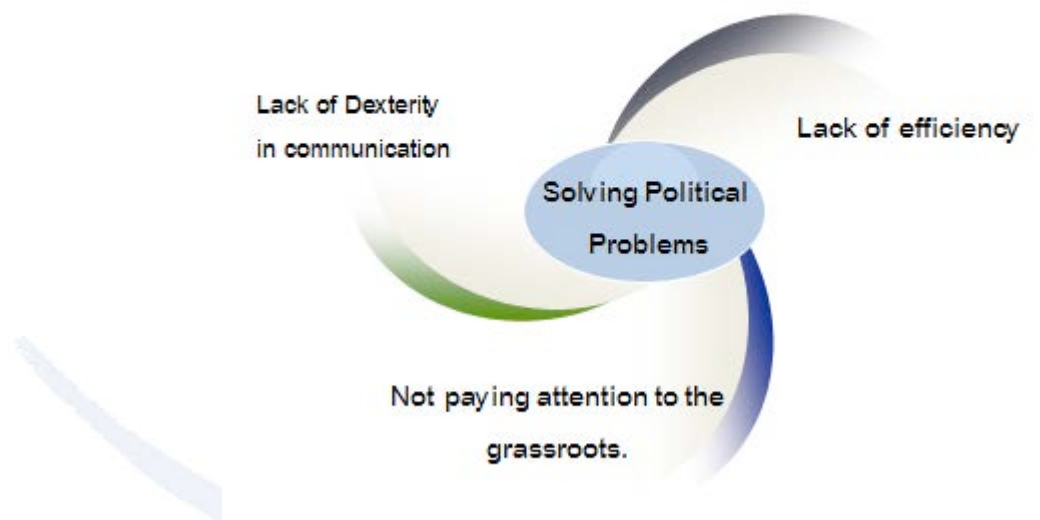


Figure 5 shows elements of the solving of political problems of General Surayut as reported in the newspaper. The elements of the solving of political problems of General Surayut as reported in the newspaper consisted of the following details:

➤ Lack of efficiency

General Surayut lacked efficiency. Columnists criticized that the government work with no efficiency. There are weaknesses in government because it did not have achievement. They were naïve. There was no teamwork and system of work.

➤ No paying attention to grassroots

The appointment of General Surayut brought the despondent on his virtues. There were words like “old merit has gone” and the “popularity that was built for a long time faded away. The faith of the public toward him has vanished.

➤ Lack of dexterity in communication

General Surayut lacked skills in communication. It was evident from the word “General Surayut allowed the news time to be seized. The government never comes up to make any news. The government lost in the media war. Ministers had work, but they never publicized.

3.4 Solving of Problem in the three Southern Provinces

From the analysis of the issue of solving the problems in the three southern provinces, Matichon Daily and Manager Daily reported that there were three issues related to the failures of problem solving: coming to naught, the prime minister should have not said about the failure, and the lack of public relation as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6



From Figure 4.6, which shows the news reporting from Matichon Daily and Manager Daily, on the solving of problems in the three southern provinces, it was found that three issues were notable.

➤ Failure in solving problem

The government of General Surayut managed the problem in the three southern provinces without efficiency. The main cause is that they also lacked visions in administering the country.

➤ The Prime Minister should have not said on the media that the southern provinces’ problem was unsolvable

General Surayut said that if anyone could solve this problem, he would pay high respect by prostrating himself in front of that person. The words he spoke did not do anything good. It could have been inferred that the Prime Minister did not have enough capabilities to solve the problems. He was desperate in this issue.

➤ **Being weak in public relations**

The government of General Surayut Chulanont slightly publicized the performance and achievement to the public. When compared with the communication and public relations of the Thai Rak Thai government led by Police Colonel Thaksin Shinawatra, the Thai Rak Thai performed much better on this issue.

4. Political Behaviors

The Matichon Daily and Manager Daily reported on this issue relating to approving the raise of Privy Councilors' wage, the purchase of land without documents in Nakorn Ratchasima Province, and the procurement of a house on the Khao Yai Tieng Hill, Nakorn Ratchasima Province.

4.1. The approval of wage increase for the Privy Council

➤ The analysis of the news report in the Matichon Daily and the Manager Daily, it was found that approving the raise of the Privy Council's salary was conflict of interest making old merits vanished and virtue disappeared, being criticized as a prime minister with cabinet who had conflicts of interest. The cabinet members of General Surayut Chulanont, the National Anti-Corruption Commission was accused of having double standard. The prime minister avoided answering question on some issues. There were violations of National Forest Conservation Act. And they were criticized as unethical as shown in figure 7.

Figure 7

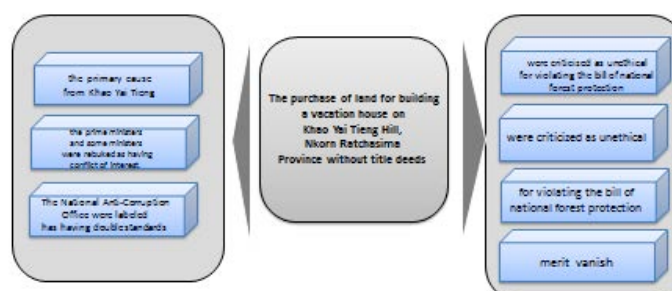


Figure 7 shows the criticisms from the newspapers regarding General Surayut on the purchase of land without title deeds on Khao Yai Tieng Hill.

➤ **Conflict of interest**

That the Prime Minister allowed the members of the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand to receive the salary from multiple positions, both the new and the existing position was a shameful act that should never have happened. So the media did not agree with this approval because they did not help people in the grassroots.

The purchase of land for building a vacation house on Khao Yai Tieng Hill, Nkorn Ratchasima Province without title deeds.

Columnists from newspapers criticized that there were seven points to reprimand General Surayut on this issue. That the primary cause from Khao Yai Tieng case made old merit vanish, old virtue gone, and the prime ministers and some ministers were rebuked as having conflicts of interest. The National Anti-Corruption Office was labeled has having double standards and was criticized as unethical for violating the bill of national forest protection.

Primary cause of the case “Khao Yai Tieng Hill Vacation House”

The person who blew the whistle on the purchase of land without title deeds on Khao Yai Tieng Hill was General Chaowalit Yongjaiyut, former prime minister. His intention was to attack the prime minister then. Later members of Thai Rak Thai party amplified the story.

- Old merit vanished and virtue disappeared.

The disclosure of General Surayut’s owned land without title deeds in a national forest made the accumulated virtue of General Surayut faded away. The image of the soldier who was honest and moral also disappeared.

- Being criticized as a prime minister with cabinet who had conflicts of interest.

The cabinet members of General Surayut Chulanont such as Aree Wongaraya, Minister of Interior, Sittichai Pokaiudom, Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Oranut Osathanon, Deputy Minister of Commerce were accused of having conflict of interest and being unethical because they owned stocks more than five percent of a registered company which violated the bill on partnership and stocks of ministers year 2543 BE.

- The National Anti-Corruption Commission was accused of having doubled standard.

That the National Anti-Corruption Commission ruled that the possession of stock by cabinet members was not against the law, but just not appropriate combined with the refusing to investigate the case of Khao Yai Tieng, even though it was evident that the wrong doing was greater, might cause popularity and credibility to diminish.

When General Surayut met the representative from Poor People Assembly, the representative commented that owning of land in a national forest was similar to poor people living encroaching the national park land. The poor people were prosecuted, yet General Surayut was not. This was a bias and conflict of interest.

- The prime minister avoided answering question on some issues. After asked by Lieutenant commander Prasong Sunsiri and some members of parliament criticized the inappropriateness of the government leader in having land without title deeds on Kho Yai Tieng Hill, General Surayut avoided giving interviews on this issue. Columnists called for confession and admission of inappropriate conduct as well as returning the land back to the country.

- Violation of National Forest Conservation Act

The possession of land on Khao Yai Tieng Hill of General Surayut, the prime minister was against the National Forest Conservation Bill B.E. 2507 Section 16 bis. paragraph 2 which stated that the area was proclaimed to be the national forest in B.E. 2508. Also, when Lieutenant commander Prasong Sunsiri as the chair of the National Legislative Assembly inspected the area from maps and military map, aerial photos, ground, satellite, it was found that the land of General Surayut was located on the national forest.

- Being criticized as unethical

Columnists criticized that General Surayut lacked common sense in being a government leader because he did not show any responsibility. It could be compared to a female athlete who used performance-enhancing drug and won the medal. Later she was stripped off her position after got caught. While General Surayut got caught having land in the national forest, he was indifferent and was not responsible for anything.

5. Management of political news of General Surayut Chulanont

From the analysis of political news report of General Surayut Chulanont, it was found that Matichon Daily and Manager Daily presented three points regarding the management of information. They are denial, excuse, and justification as follows.

5.1 Denial

Matichon Daily and Manager Daily reported that General Surayut Chulanont denied reporters that he never said during his time of being Chief Commander of the Army that there were some people persuading him to organize a coup. General Surayut Chulanont refused and questioned back the reporter who asked this question. The analysis also found that Matichon Daily and Manager Daily reported three points regarding denial.

1) General Surayut Chulanont denied that he never said that Lieutenant commander Prasong Sunsiri wanted him to join in a coup. General Surayut Chulanont said that he never said anything like that. News reporter reminded him that he said that someone asked him to commit a coup, but he did not want to commit it while he was holding a Chief Commander position. News reporter asked whether this matter caused Prasong to feel in contempt. General Surayut Chulanont refused that he had never said anywhere. Columnist criticized him on this issue for not admitting the fact and not wishing to discuss the matter further.

2) General Surayut Chulanont denied that he did not violate any laws. From this denial, the analysis of the political news report found that General Surayut Chulanont referred to the purchase as legally ended process because he had paid the previous owner for the land and paid tax. Therefore, he did not feel worried that the purchase was not legitimate.

5.2 Avoiding Answering Questions

The analysis of the data found that Matichon Daily and Manager Daily reported that General Surayut Chulanont avoided answering questions in three points.

1) He used the strategy to assign someone to explain. In the parliament, he used this strategy by asking Mr. Theerapat Serirangsan, the Minister attached to the Office of the Prime Minister to explain issues in the parliament.

2) General Surayut Chulanont avoided answering questions asked by the reporter by diverging the questions, especially the questions about owning the land on Khao Yai Tieng Hill. No matter how often the reporters asked him, he never answered.

3) General Surayut Chulanont used the silence techniques in winning over a situation. Columnist criticized that after being attacked by Lieutenant commander Prasong Sunsiri, Chair of the National Legislative Assembly on the case of Khao Yai Tieng, he opted to use the silence to win over the chaos because he did not want to cause any damages to himself.

5.3 Excuse

The analysis of the political news report on the issue of “excuse” which General Surayut Chulanont, the prime minister, used as a strategy to solve the problem of violence in the three southern provinces. He always apologized people in the three provinces for doing something that cause anger and dissatisfaction.

The prime minister apologized the residents of the three southern provinces. Apologizing to the people in the three southern provinces was both agreed and disagreed up on. In Islam, a person who apologizes is forgiven. However, most columnists diid not agree because apologizing criminals would not help ease the bad situation and stop the violence. His apology did not do any good thing.

5.4 Justification

From the analysis of the justification of General Surayut Chulanont, the prime minister, it was found that Matichon Daily and Manager Daily presented justification of the prime minister in case of being unethical for purchasing land without title deeds on Khao Yai Tieng Hill as follows:

General Surayut Chulanont claimed that he was an ordinary man. From the analysis of the political news report in Matichon Daily and Manager Daily on the issue of the claim by General Surayut Chulanont that he was not a miracle man, it was found that after being attacked by Lieutenant commander Prasong Sunsiri and was condemned by the media for being less ethical as a government leader, he claimed that he was an ordinary man. He was not different from others in the society. This claim was viewed as pleading for sympathy from the public.

Discussion:

Results showed that the Prime Minister failed to solve the bombing situations in Bangkok, economic problems, political problems, and the violence in three southern provinces. The period that General Surayut Chulanont became prime minister made Thai people didn't have confidence in a political leader and the country's economic. There was a phenomenon in Thailand (2007) that Thai people then had a trend to worship some objects. (god amulet)

Results showed that newspaper reported a few cases of solving “drug” problems. The PM was more interested in protecting his own authority and government control than drug problems.

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