

BURNING ISSUE**It's a race against time for Prime Minister Prayuth****JINTANA PANYAARVUDH**

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TIME FLIES, as they say. It's already four months since General Prayuth Chan-ocha overthrew the previous government in a coup on May 22.

However, opinion surveys show that most Thai citizens support the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) and the military-led government of Prime Minister Prayuth, which was appointed early this month.

According to the Bangkok Poll

released on Saturday, some 67 per cent of the respondents across the nation said they wanted Prayuth's government to stay until the country is peaceful and all its problems are solved – even if it takes longer than the year it has scheduled.

Prayuth's style appears to please the public – he is tough, strong and decisive and also has a sense of humour.

Judging from his weekly television address, which is high in the ratings, he is good at making speeches. However, some of his remarks can be hurtful.

His most recent comments about bikini-wearing foreign tourists and a red-shirt activist drew criticism both at home and overseas. Fortunately, Prayuth decided to apologise for both instances.

Clearly, the PM has realised that he needs to make a few adjustments, changing from a military officer to a sort of politician. Also, he is learning that not everything he does is correct.

As they say, silence is golden. Maybe it would help if Prayuth remembered this and only spoke when it's necessary.

Then there's the opposition to his

tough measures, such as banning any and all political forums.

The recent cancelling of two such discussions held in university campuses has earned Prayuth further criticism for curbing people's right to free expression.

Maybe the premier should relax some rules, giving people back their freedom of expression.

Another tough task that lies ahead for Prayuth is the naming of 250 members of the National Reform Council (NRC), especially since there are widespread concerns that military men will

dominate the council much like the NLA and the Cabinet.

The NRC is one of the five key lines of focus in Prayuth's roadmap. In fact, it should be made the most important line of focus as the NRC is tasked with proposing a framework for national reform to the National Legislative Assembly, the Cabinet and the NCPO, as well as to provide guidelines for the Constitution Drafting Committee.

Hence, the council will play a vital role in shaping the country's reform in 11 issues as well as "strengthening" the

charter – especially since Thailand's administration will need to be based on both.

However, with the criticism and confusion surrounding the setting up of the NRC – including concerns that the junta has preferences for the 250 members – Prayuth needs to ensure that the public will have no reason to doubt any reform proposals the NRC members make.

Now, with time ticking by quickly, the junta chief should not just rely on positive opinion in surveys but do what is best for the country.