

Prayut dismisses Chavalit's warning of 'counter coup'

THE NATION

PRIME MINISTER Prayut Chan-ocha yesterday hit back at a counter-coup warning from former prime minister General Chavalit Yongchaiyud, saying he would not stage a coup against his own government and he was confident others would not either.

The military's top brass has also played down the warning, claiming the military is united under Prayut.

Chavalit's comments on Sunday came at a time when Prayut and his government have experienced a slight drop in popularity, according to a Bangkok Poll that was taken to mark the government's third month in power.

The government scored relatively poorly for its economic performance but the public gave it the tick of approval for overseeing political stability.

Before Chavalit called a press conference to discuss the counter-coup talk, news broke that the Supreme Court had ruled that Naruemol Nanthachot, the daughter of General Samrit Nanthachot, Chavalit's close aide, was "unusually rich" and assets worth Bt68 million had been confiscated.

Chavalit advised Prayut to tone down his attitude in order to gain support from all sides.

He said the government should not view people with different views as the enemy.

He also warned the government to ensure it made solving economic problems its first priority, with political issues a secondary concern.

The ex-PM fears fresh political turmoil will arise as a result of the pending new constitution and there could be a counter-coup.

Chavalit also expressed concern about the government's policies when dealing with insurgents in the deep South.

Defence Minister and Army chief Udomdej Sitabutr labelled Chavalit's comments personal opinion.

He said the government was doing its best to address the country's problems and the military observed orders from Prayut, who seized power from the elected government in May.

As for viewing the public as the enemy, Udomdej said the country now had the Reconciliation Centre for Reform to give people the chance to give suggestions on national reform. There will be more than 4,000 forums for this purpose nationwide, he said.

Interior Minister Anupong Paochinda also ruled out any chance of a new coup, saying he was aware of the situation and the public was still satisfied with the government's performance.

"We have not done anything that the public finds unacceptable like corruption or abuse of power. We believe society is giving us a chance," he said.

Justice Minister General Paiboon Koomchaya also shrugged off the coup warning, saying the country's political situation was normal.

Asked if he was confident the military was united, Paiboon said he was confident in Prayut.

"The PM has ruled out any coup under his term," he said.