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## Unshakeable self-belief is a heavy burden

**S**elf-righteousness has been both a boon and bane for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

As the PM's emotional outbursts become more frequent, the level of aggression more alarming, it seems his attitude can use a little adjustment so it brings more positive results.

There is no doubt the former army chief is the strongest asset which the military regime and government has. Even Gen Prayut's detractors would have to agree.

A recent poll by Suan Dusit showed more than 80% of the country is satisfied with the government's performance over the past six months under Gen Prayut.

Another survey by Bangkok University Research Centre also revealed the PM enjoyed a higher approval rate than his entire cabinet.

Based on a 10-point evaluation system, respondents gave Gen Prayut 7.25 points while rating the government at 6.2 points.

According to the survey, Gen Prayut's decisive manner is the quality most liked by the respondents.

People who have watched or listened to Gen Prayut's speeches would have no doubt that this is a man who believes wholeheartedly in the righteousness of his cause.

No matter what critics have to say about the coup and resulting curbs on human rights and freedom, Gen Prayut has remained steadfast in his conviction that security, conformity and order must come first.

It's not that Gen Prayut does not know there is collateral damage in his declaring martial law and invoking heavy-handed measures to control the situation.

It is more like he firmly believes the immediate shortfall is worth what he thinks should bring about long-term stability.

There is nothing wrong with having faith in one's actions or vision. What is

going on with the premier, however, is there seems to be an unmistakable sense of rectitude attached to everything he thinks or does.

The result is an uptight attitude. And uptightness does not sit well with the present time when people are demanding more freedom and rights, especially to keep the government in check.

Since Gen Prayut appears to fully believe that he is doing good things for the public, he does not want hear any negative remarks.

In fact, he probably does not even understand why there is criticism against the junta or his government.

That is why the PM has told the media time and again they should focus on reporting only good things about the government.

That is why he could not stand even an innocuous question about what his government has delivered so far, and had to muse out loud about wanting to punch the reporter who asked that question in the face.

The PM's righteousness could stem from his conviction in the absolute necessity of the coup, that the power seizure was the only thing preventing the country from falling apart.

As far as Gen Prayut is concerned, staging the May 22 coup must have been an enormous personal sacrifice on his part as well.

He probably believes he has given up his own happiness, a blissful retirement probably, to return happiness to people in a country torn apart by years of political conflicts. That would explain why the premier resents any attempt to question him or his government.

Gen Prayut has also shown an increasing frustration that some people will not listen to him and still try to defy him even after 10 months of his working hard for the country.

The thing with self-righteousness is while it can inspire total confidence from people who agree with you, it usually leaves no room for those with even a little difference of opinion to join forces.

The belief in an absolute correctness of the coup and his roadmap to peace might have been necessary for Gen Prayut to pull off what he viewed as an arduous task of putting back together a broken nation.

The PM, however, is more than mid-way on this path already. The self-righteousness seems to have served its purpose.

From this point on, the PM will need the public to start showing its opinions, whether it's about the new draft charter or reform issues.

When the time comes for free speech, a sense of righteousness on anybody's

part will stymie attempts to foster a genuine, constructive debate.

Self-righteousness is also a heavy burden. Those who carry it around for a long time tend to get angry easily. That can't be right.

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