

Situation Report on Bangkok

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After days of heavy seasonal rain, causing rivers to burst their banks, great areas in Thailand still suffer from major flooding; central regions of Thailand and northern parts of Bangkok were hit hardest. The number of people killed by flooding in northern Thailand has passed 600, officials say on the november 24th.

The situation in greater Bangkok remains variable and in some places critical. It is not excluded that parts of central Bangkok, which have remained unscathed, will become affected by the flooding during the coming weeks. Bangkok International Airport is functioning normally. Don Muaeng airport has been closed since october 25th and will remain closed foreseeable future. Travelers still must expect complications in transportation connection, limitation on freedom of movement as well as electricity and water shortages in some places. Finding drinking water, food and medical assistance may be hindered, but got slightly better in the recent days.

Given the current situation, Swiss government advises Tourists and Swiss abroad to keep up to date on the situation by consulting information from the media and the internet. On site, follow the instructions from local authorities.

Evacuation

Upon assessing all the relating parameters of the incident the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration deems that the situation in several areas could endanger lives and cause damage to belongings of people residing in the affected areas.

A list of evacuated sub-districts and announcements for those residing at certain areas can be found under the following address:

http://www.bangkokgis.com/flood/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=34&Itemid=90

Swiss abroad

6,458 Swiss people are currently living in Thailand. They are advised to look out for and follow the instructions of the local authorities in Bangkok. At the moment, Swiss government does not call on their citizens to return to Switzerland; however, Thai authorities recommend leaving the city of Bangkok for the moment.

Disease outbreaks

Health hazards are becoming a major concern as contamination of floodwater caused mainly by uncollected garbage is widespread. In Bangkok, residents are encouraged to sort and separate rubbish, with decaying foodstuff and materials tightly sealed, as only 30 percent of daily garbage can be collected at the moment. Warnings against waterborne zoonosis and food poisoning have been issued.

The Public Health Ministry's Department of Medical Sciences warned of possible leptospirosis in flooded areas on Nov. 7. Consuming ice and iced drinks from unknown production sources should be avoided. In recent survey, 21 food samples yielded food poisoning manifestations, while 17 out of 57 samples of drinking water possessed germs which caused diarrhea.

One leptospirosis case and 20 suspected cases were reported. The bacterial disease, which is usually found in flooded areas up to 3 weeks after a flood recedes, is potentially fatal.

Other dangers due to flooding

There are disturbing reports of dangerous animals such as snakes and crocs appearing in the floodwaters. The Ministry of Public Health boosted its stockpile of anti-snake serum by a further 3500 dosages and dispatched a few hundred to flood-hit areas. Every public hospital outside Bangkok has 10 dosages in stock now.

Many newspapers print hints how to handle with this situation, although it appears those tips are not very helpful to calm Thailand's citizens.

This natural disaster reveals pressure between the central government and the city government dominated by the main opposition, the former ruling Democrat Party.

Inner Bangkok is protected by a network of dikes and sandbags walls and therefore most dry. Huge amounts of water are dammed up to the north, west and east of the city. New areas are being flooded daily as the water tries to find its way towards the sea.

Anger is seething in flooded areas, leading to disputes among local and national officials on the best course of action. Bangkok's 12 million people account for 41 percent of the Thailand's gross domestic product, and neither the central government nor the city administration wants to be responsible for an inner-city deluge.

But misery in outlying areas, especially north and west Bangkok, destroy any success gained in the fight against the water in the inner city, especially given a perception that those areas have been sacrificed to save the city center.

Thailand is a major exporter for computer hard drives and global prices are already rising because of flood-related shortages. Thailand is also Southeast Asia's main auto-parts manufacturer and flooding problems rock the industry.

The government has announced to support the people and economy with a 100 billion (\$4bn.) recovery plan. Prime Minister Shinawatra said the money would be used to rebuild homes and businesses and restore the economy, which has been badly affected.

International help

When the flood started, the USS George Washington was ordered to position near Thailand in case assistance was required. The command also sent a Marine humanitarian assistance survey team from Okinawa to assess the flood situation. After meeting with Thai authorities, the team determined that military assistance from the US was not needed as the Thai government and military had the matter in hand. The destroyer USS Mustin also made an unscheduled visit to Laem Chabang port for community service and military to military engagements last month.

Four Swiss water experts assessed the floodwater management and the drinking water quality in the flood affected areas. In a debriefing meeting with Prime Minister Shinawatra on Thursday 9 November, they presented their main findings and recommendations.

During their rapid assessment mission the two floodwater management experts travelled to several locations. They underlined that a disaster of this scale is rare and too big to manage in any circumstances. The experts were careful to point out that the short duration of their mission did not allow them to make a detailed prognosis of how the floods would actually continue to develop. Despite the immediate measures which had been taken, the inflow of the water in greater Bangkok will remain high and the impact of the flood will be felt for some days and weeks to come.

Given that floods are a recurring phenomenon in Thailand, they recommended that a medium and longer term plan and strategy to mitigate the impact be implemented as soon as possible.

The two drinking water quality specialists visited and examined water in several locations. Given the fact

that drinking water is systematically chlorinated, the drinking water quality in the city as well as in the flooded areas was overall good.

They recommended that the chlorine control should be managed by water professionals on a regular and systematic basis throughout the flooded areas and not only in the Bangkok water treatment plant. Several water samples were examined in evacuation centers. Like in some other areas in the periphery of Bangkok where the chlorine showed tendencies of being depleted, the water supply in these centers often showed insufficient chlorine levels. Systematic chlorination is required to avoid a potential outbreak of disease.

Recommendations:

- The quality of tap water within the Bangkok Water Supply System is chlorinated and therefore drinkable.
- It is recommended to use bottled drinking water if available.
- If individual storage of drinking water is made, it is advised to additionally chlorinate the water through experts.
- Aqua tablets can be used to make water safe and drinkable if correctly applied
- Continued and close disease control is a priority by the Government and public information must be followed.

Financial losses

The majority of insurance losses from the Thai floods will come from manufacturing and supply chains. According to AM Best the financial loss could reach 20 billion dollars.

The floods are labeled the costliest natural disaster in Southeast Asia and they are likely to rank among the 10 costliest natural catastrophes worldwide.

Economic losses caused by prolonged flooding are estimated up to 1.12 trillion baht or 10.5% of gross domestic product. Nearly 10,000 factories had been hit by floods. The industrial sector has suffered losses of 457 billion baht, of which 237 billion due to damage to factories.

Further information: JDMT Medical Services AG; www.jdmt.ch, www.jmin.ch.