A very good evening to you all.

A well-respected US-based travel magazine, Condé Nast Traveler, has recently released its survey which pooled votes from readers around the world, placing Thailand at number 1 for the “best country for people” and number 3 for the “best country” category, only behind Italy and Greece.

In addition, the famous Samui Island of Surat Thani Province came in at number 9 for the “best islands in the world.” Also, I’d like to extend my congratulations to Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Bangkok and Six Senses Yao Noi Resort on Yao Noi Island in Phang Nga Province for winning the 4th and 5th places for “best hotels in Asia and the Indian Subcontinent.

Other categories included in the report were best airlines, best airports, and best architecture. These rankings reflect the feelings and experiences of visitors to Thailand both direct and indirect regarding the Thai ways of life, the smiles, the generosity, the politeness, and the quality of services, Starting from air travel, visitors receive the best of care from airlines as they travel to and from destinations, not to mention transportation services, foods and restaurants, scam-free services, the cleanliness of hotels and accommodations, the way of life, and most importantly the safety. For these reasons, Thailand was voted the best country for people.

As for the image of Thailand, unity and solidarity were witnessed during the rescue mission of Moo Pa (Wild Boars) football team that was trapped in Tham Luang Cave, Chiang Rai Province. The event received attention from around the world. Positive points such as voluntary spirit of the Thai people in time of difficulties were witnessed by people from around the world.

Our ability to manage such a difficult situation effectively reflects the high quality of our human resources as well as our management system. We are now internationally recognized. These awards, honors, and recognitions are the pride of Thailand and her people.

The road to success was not a bed of roses. However, it is even more challenging to sustainably maintain our achievement as well as the positive reception we received. It is, therefore, our responsibility to work together for a better future of our beloved country.

Please remember that one rotten apple spoils the entire barrel. It is now a world of information. One mistake by an individual or a group of people could cause a catastrophic effect, especially in the uncontrollable digital era where news can be published from just one click.

My fellow citizens, the Government’s approach to promoting tourism is focused on wealth distribution and job creation in a form of community tourism. Not only will it trigger growth in our local economy, community tourism is the answer to poverty eradication and community strengthening.

Our goal is for Thailand to generate as much as 3.4 trillion baht from tourism in 2019, higher than this year’s 3 trillion baht target. What we have to improve and have been doing for the past 4 years is the development of basic infrastructure, transportation services, and digital services to accommodate the increasing number of tourists, in Thailand and from overseas. Hotels and accommodations is another factor we have to focus on given there remain regulations that do not support today’s styles of tourism which have shifted towards natural attractions and the local way of life such as spending a night in a fishery villages and mangrove forest communities where visitors can wake up to experience the atmosphere of mangrove forest and firefly sightseeing on a boat at dusk.

This includes joining big festivals from season to season such as a fruit picking (from organic farm) festival. Big hotels may not be the answer for tourists nowadays. At present, the Department of Local Administration (DLA) is working with Air BNB, an online marketplace and hospitality service, to boost local tourism and bring growth to local destinations.

Thai people and communities are encouraged to let their properties to visitors looking for short stays. There are no application fees. Eligible homes must be located in the areas governed by the Local Administrative Organization who will be responsible for home inspection, making sure owners can provide safety, cleanliness, food, and good experience for visitors. Homeowners will turn themselves into entrepreneurs.

As for the issue concerning hotel and accommodation laws, the DLA said houses that have no more than 4 bedrooms and accommodate no more than 20 visitors are not considered hotels. Owners only have to register with the district office. District officers will inspect all houses for qualifications and offer suggestions.

This campaign was organized for qualified home owners in local communities all over the country to connect home owners and visitors on Air BNB platform.

The Cabinet meeting this week approved a ministerial regulation concerning the structure of buildings used for hotel businesses as proposed by the Interior Ministry. The new regulation will require many hotels and buildings to remodel themselves for safety reasons.

Interested individual can submit their application for remodeling building structure for hotel business purpose. There are less restrictions for building with less than 4 floors.

In the case of remodeling, all construction and related works must be completed within 5 years. This is the period given to owners to make sure their buildings are up to the standard set by the law. People have 5 years to complete the whole process starting from the day of the enforcement. This new regulation is for everyone. It doesn’t favor anyone.

The Government does not want anything from anyone, but only wishes to see business owners equally benefit with equal access to opportunity. We need to address overall current issues in the hotel industry to make it in line with the development of our nation while equally distribution wealth across rural provinces. Hotel business leads to many other businesses.

For example, some families can use the money they earn daily/weekly from their homestay businesses to pay off their property mortgages. Property mortgage is a big burden for many families. I don’t want people to bear the thought that the law only benefits the rich and deprives the poor of their opportunities.

This way, people can use their homes to generate extra income and cultivate entrepreneur skills. They will be able to integrate themselves in the business chain.

The “Thailand Moves Forward” show aired on Saturday, August 25th, talked about community tourism. The volunteer guest host was Mew Nittha. The show conveyed profound messages as well as provided a deep understanding of local tourism, a business model that can connect many businesses in the community together to form community enterprise.

For instance, homeowners can hire a chef to cook for their guests. They can buy food ingredients from farmers within the community. There could be young guides who can speak English and local languages to help foreign guests learn more about the community as well as introduce visitors to local handicraft products, OTOP, and GI products from local artisans as well as an opportunity to learn the local way of life. Part of the money earned from community enterprises shall be put back to community development projects such as waste disposal, restoration of tourist attractions, education, village fund, and tourism fund etc.

This is a sustainable model the Government is putting forward. Regulations including tax incentives are being drafted to strengthen community enterprises nationwide. Once communities are strong, the country will be strong, prosperous, and sustainable.

Our new approach came in the wake of concerns that large hotels will be affected. We must have diversity in our accommodations so that visitors and tourists can choose where they want to stay and how much they want to spend.

Those who want to experience superb services can stay at large hotels. Homestays are for visitors who may have lower budget or wish to experience the nature. Homestay business gives tourists an alternative. But most importantly, local people will be part of the business.

My fellow Thai citizen, in the past many people have been troubled by debt due to increasing in production costs and decreasing sales. Many who weren't able to access the public and private funding channels have instead relied on off-the-grid solutions, especially informal debt with land sale with right of redemption agreements that are unjust, resulting in a loss of ownership over their only asset and tool for making a living.

In the past, although laws related to sale with right of redemption have stipulated time windows for repurchasing and ceilings for interest rates, there has been exploitation of loopholes to take advantage of low income farmers.

Many times sellers have no bargaining power and understanding of related laws but in desperate need of money, therefore, they were persuaded to engage in unfair agreements, such as ones with very short repurchased time frames of 3 to 4 months, making it very unlikely that they would be able to recover their property.

Each time they engage in an agreement, they need to pay tens of thousands of baht in fees. Sometimes, the deadlines are set during off seasons, making it difficult for farmers to find the money to repurchase their land.

These problems show that existing laws are not effective enough in preventing farmers from losing their land to investors. This has been a long-standing issue for over 50 years. Thailand has around 300 million rai of occupational land. Of this amount, 150 million is farmland. Half of this 150 million rai is land that farmers need to rent from others.

This shows that this group may have already lost their land through schemes that had occurred in the past. To make matters worse, around 30 million from this 70 million rai amount is under mortgage or sale with right of redemption agreements.

Hundreds of thousands rai of farmland might be under sale with right of redemption agreements. Many farmers are likely to lose their lands as the current law allows buyer to have the ownership of the land when the other party cannot redeem the land. Interests was never an issue from the beginning.

Most recently, protecting people engaging in land sale with right of redemption agreement for agricultural and housing purposes act was drafted. The new law will help resolve old problems in ways such as making this business a consumer protecting business where the agreement must be registered at the Department of Lands.

The registration must detail the names of both parties, the location of the land, the interest rates, and the deadline. In addition, seller cannot give up their redemption right to prevent the land from being taken away from farmers.

This includes requiring the timeline for redemption to be no less than 1 to 1.5 years to prevent agreements with short time frames that can easily be manipulated. This new legislation is expected to close loopholes and resolve the issue of land lost to unfair agreements. Farmers must learn of the contents of this law and how it applies to their circumstances.

 In addition, the Government has various mechanisms that help farmers redeem their land easier such as,

1. The circulating fund for farmers and low income citizens who are eligible to ask for financial assistance in redeeming their land. These people include the parents or offspring of qualified low income earners. The fund will approve up to 2.5 million baht in loans with an interest rate of 5% and a repayment time frame of 20 years.

2. The fund for the rehabilitation and development of farmers in order to assist farmers in debt. Those who qualify are those with registered debt or overdue debt including those who are facing force auction. The fund will provide up to 2.5 million baht in loans with an interest rate of 1% per year.

and 3. The Land Bank Administration Institute that will provide loans to farmers in cases such as,

(1) Paying off or redeeming land that is currently under sale with right of redemption or mortgage agreement

(2) Paying off debts with land as collateral

(3) Paying off debts according to court rulings.

and 4. Purchasing land that has been in force auction or listed in the general market for no more than 5 years (Previous owner were force to enter force auction).

I hope that these measures will help alleviate troubles and we will eventually see the number of land owned by farmers continuously increase in the long run.

Do not listen to people who say that this issue does not require a system-wide overhaul. we will not be able to address the issue if we do not proceed according to the law. We must return back to how things were where farmers had land to conduct their occupations.

As for those who are indebted to unofficial lenders, whether it be regarding land or not, if you are confronted with injustice, you can ask for assistance from the Damrong Tham hotline 1567. The Government will then implement a process of providing assistance.

My fellow Thai citizens, in order to plan out policies to improve the well-being of the people, part of it came through various government offices that have received complaints, and the other part was from the many visits to provincial areas of cabinet, ministers, and officials. We listen to the needs of people so that we can use this information to define public policies or improve on laws and close past loopholes.

However, communication is very important as it creates understanding. It is a challenge to send messages to everyone, especially low-income farmers that work all day who may not have the time to learn about the policies and what the Government is trying to offer

For example, the case of “Aunt Thien” who suffered injustice from informal debt, as well as an unfair sale with right of redemption agreement. “Barry Nadech” Is among the artists with a volunteer heart who helped convey positive development that can help a lot of people by presenting case studies of problems that have been resolved through this most recent episode of Moving Thailand Forward show.

Therefore, the Government and the NCPO has organized activities to thank all artists from various music labels such as Pope Tanawat, Tui Kiatkamol, Top Jaron, Barry Nadech, Toei Pongsakorn, Mew Nittha, and Om Atshar who have already been featured on air as well as those who will be appearing soon, including Tuck Mayura, Bee Sukrit, Cherprang, Tono, Film Thanaphad, and Bee Namthip. I hear that there will be artists featured on the show until the end of the year. Tomorrow, Woody will talk about family clinics and healthcare.

However, public service isn't limited to only being featured on shows. I would like to remind everyone of Toon Bodyslam who had dedicated himself in his first 400 kilometer run and second 2,000 kilometer run during the Kao Kon La Kao project to raise funds for various hospitals across the country to purchase medical tools and equipment.

Most recently, I heard that he plans on organizing a third event for the purpose of raising funds to purchase medical equipment and necessities for the 84th Anniversary Navamindrapobitr Building at Siriraj Hospital at Mahidol University. The campaign will also air the film “2215, Belief, Crazy, Brave and Take a Step”.

Admission is free from September 6 to 16 at SF Cinema and Major Cineplex theaters across the country for a total of 2,880 screenings and at the Nimibutr Stadium on September 14 to 16.

You can participate in this activity or make donations through the channels listed below. Also, if organizations or the private sector wish to book an entire screening or make corporate donations, they can take part as well.

Finally, I would like to say that doing good things for the nation can be done by anyone in any capacity. We must have faith, believe in sound principles, remain free of fraud, and fear wrongdoings.

The most practical thing is to take care of one's physical and mental health by exercising regularly, getting enough rest, and eating right.

This will distance us away from diseases and give us the energy to work and generate income. When we are strong, we will not become burdens to our family and will be able to care for our loved ones as well as our society and country. Together, we can move the country forward.

Thank you and I hope that everyone takes care of their health and that all families are happy. Sawasdee krub.