**From the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to Sustainable Development Goals December 14, 2018**

Good evening to you all.

On December 12-13, Cabinet Ministers and I visited Bueng Kan and Nong Khai and held a cabinet meeting there. Both provinces are home to several farm products such as rice, sugarcane, cassava, and rubber.

In addition, these two provinces are rich in natural resources and cultures, capable of becoming eco- and historical tourism destinations as well as world heritage and the land of pilgrimage. Both provinces border Thailand’s neighboring nations with the Mekong River serving as the main gateway.

Therefore, (the Government) aims to develop the upper northern region to be destination for leading agro-industry, trade, tourism, and sustainable communities, with focuses on 1) becoming a gateway to our neighboring countries, 2) becoming eco-tourism Mekong-style attractions, and 3) becoming a center for border trade and investment.

Bueng Kan province has several model projects underway.

One notable project is mobile health services in remote districts of the province, offering basic medical needs such as dental services, eye exams, mental health services, career training, and other forms of services based on local demands.

Bueng Kan is the first city to be introduced to the campaign, starting from the second and third weeks of December onwards. The campaign is dedicated to His Majesty the Late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of the Ninth Reign, as well as His Majesty King. It is also considered a New Year gift for the Thai people.

The second model project is the development of rubber-based products. Bueng Kan has 850,000 rai of rubber plantations, the most in the northeastern region, making rubber the province’s main economic crop. Emphasis will be placed on rubber products, making the province a rubber learning center with focuses on the quality, raw materials, processing, marketing, and logistics. The province will become a rubber trade and processing hub, with more than 100 auction markets spreading throughout several districts, in addition to rubber processing factories. Also, there will be a rubber export center. Rubber products will be sold in the global market through Laem Chabang Port and Southern China.

As for Nong Khai, the province also has several interesting projects.

The first one is the irrigation system development project which caters to the public demand for water as well as future demand from special economic zones of Nong Khai. We need to have a long-term plan, given the rise in demand for water and supply insufficiency. We need to prepare for future demand. The Government has therefore planned to overhaul the untreated water system, water production, and water distribution, under the regional water distribution and extension project at Pa Kho Water Plant in the capital district. The project will increase the production capacity by 1,000 cubic meters of water per hour, addressing the need for water in the next decade.

The second project is the improvement of OTOP product. This year, Nong Khai has been able to continue developing its quality goods such as foods, drinks, fabrics, accessories, and herbs that are not used as food ingredients numbering more than 1,200 products, 23 of which have been upgraded to premium (Grade A) products. The three notable premium goods are handwoven Mudmee fabrics, Nam Neung (pork ball wraps), and germinated rice which may confuse the new generation. The grains reflect hundreds of years of local wisdom.

Germinated rice is rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals passed on to the grains from their shells. It has more nutrients than the nutritious brown rice. Eating germinated rice is similar to taking supplementary, vitamins, and herbs.

Not only does it fill your stomach, but it also keeps you healthy, thus a perfect alternative for health lovers and patients. It is delighted to see that now germinated rice is available in retail shops, department stores, and online.

The third project is tourism promotion along the Mekong River and eco-community tourism in Ban Duea sub-district in Mueng Nong Khai district, one of 40 communities introduced to the “Innovative OTOP Community” campaign.

Situated on the bank of the Mekong River, the community is unique in its lifestyle, fish farming, terrace farming, culture, ancient ruins, art and music, and traditional plays. The community offers fun activities for visitors such as boat rides on the Mekong River, making flower baskets, banana leaf origami, food processing, and homestay services.

I believe whoever visits this place will fall in love with what it has to offer. I’m sure they will spread the words of how memorable and uniquely amazing this place is.

I always take my visits to local communities seriously. Not only following up on the implementation of state policies or the progress of Pracharat approach, but also taking the opportunity to be with people whom together have seeded many things with the Government. It is my duty to help them run the project to a fruitful stage.

I believe that we all have to take part in these activities because this country belongs to all of us. If we do not take care of our communities/country or if the Government exerts its policies without taking into consideration people’s needs, the country will not achieve its ultimate goal i.e. stability, prosperity, and sustainability. Law and order must also be respected.

Apart from visiting these two provinces, I received a report about one of the northeastern provinces, Loei, which I think should be granted government’s support. People in Chiang Khan district of Loei formed a network of “community developers” taken after a case study in India where food containers are all made of betel palm shells.

Tha Dee Mee in Chiang Khan district has adopted the method by using betel palm shells and banana leaf sheaves to carry food. Usually, these natural materials are often thrown away. Some of them can be used as fertilizers and turned into food containers to replace Styrofoam. Each container made of these natural materials can be reused for up to 10 times. These materials are combustible and will not turn into toxin waste that can damage our environment.

The project is supported by Loei governor and financed by local businesses who brought in a machine from India, helping to create added value to the community and reducing non-combustible waste. This is the power of Pracharat. I am glad to see that everyone is more aware of environmental issues. Other provinces should follow suit. Cooperation from the private sector on this matter would be appreciated.

Chitra Phadungsak, the pioneer of the project and now serves as an advisor to the production team at Tha Dee Mee Community, said the project gained a lot of public attention when it was launched. Hospitals, department stores, and related businesses have showed their interest in the products.

At present, the project is still in its trial period and will soon be ready for business at full stream. This is one example of a great project that shows commitment towards creativity and environmental conservation that can be expanded and multiplied to benefit our country.

Let me praise everyone involved for their support to this project and for their integrated cooperation to end the use of plastic and foam containers by switching to degradable materials. If you wish to learn how to make containers from betel palm shells or wish to buy the product, please contact the producers directly. The number is appearing on your screen.

Dear citizens, past economic growth and advances in technology have led to the expansion and development of various commercial businesses, resulting in a large number of modern shops and department stores. However, this has affected the business of small corner stores which used to be the center of communities for stimulating economic activity, propping up the local economy, as well as supporting small and medium sized businesses (SMEs). In addition, they were also a place to meet and exchange information for people in the community. This is our social connection.

Throughout Thailand, there are about 370,000 corner stores. Many are faced with the challenges of doing business because of the rise of modern shops and higher costs while their ability to compete is less than modern retailers that attract more customers with more extensive products.

Many stores have suffered a loss and their income has dropped considerably. The Government is fully aware of these problems. We are working hard to help these stores to be able to adapt and stand up in a sustainable fashion. We have provide assistances through many channels in a variety of ways, such as:

1. The store image modification project by the Department of Business Development of the Ministry of Commerce, together with major goods manufacturers. These agencies have visited different communities to help reshape the image of Pracharat Blue Flag stores and corner stores under the 5 principles of beautiful, bright, clean, convenient, and comfortable.

Also, the project provides tips about store management so that they can adapt, compete with modern retailers, and attract more customers while lowering their costs. This will allow them to operate more effectively in the long run. This project is free of charge for participants.

This project has reached 4,500 stores out of 10,000 target stores nationwide. If this project hasn’t reached your area, it is advisable, in the meantime, to try adjusting your store according to the 5 principles mentioned earlier, especially cleanliness, brightness and convenience. Corner stores have a great advantage in their ability to sale in small numbers. If you make your stores convenient and clean, you’ll be able to attract customers.

2. Adopting the "Ule Model" of China used in the development of stores. It helps to increase distribution channels of small shops in the countryside by cooperating with the post office of China to open an e-commerce store for shops in the countryside and across the country to sell products online.

In addition to general consumer goods, there are also agricultural products such as vegetables or fruits of the community - such as handicrafts, OTOP products which can’t be found in other communities. Participating stores must scan the codes of all products, from beverages to fruits and vegetables into the system for the platform to offer a wide selection of products.

Buyers around the country would be able make their purchase at any time. The shops in the community can then send products via postage service. This makes small shops a big store in the digital world, or "Corner Stores 4.0" that can sell all kinds of products without having to carry a large inventory. This model will be adapted for corner stores in Thailand to be able to run stronger businesses and meet the needs of customers. The company behind the “Ule Platform” will send a team to Thailand in early 2019 to help accelerate the process.

3. The online corner store project is an idea to develop online ordering channels between businesses (b2b) through an application or website. It is a platform for stores to order goods directly from the manufacturer.

This operation is collaboration between the Government sector and the private sector which include the Thailand Post, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, the Government Savings Bank, the BAAC, and private sector entities that produce daily necessities for people.

Thailand Post will develop channels for taking orders and inventory management online, including transportation management. The Ministry of Commerce will negotiate with manufacturers on price and select potential buyers to join the project.

The Ministry will also help connect community products with corner stores in different areas. Meanwhile, the GSB and BAAC will provide commercial loans for participating stores under the program.

This project will enable corner stores to buy products from the manufacturer at a reduced price. At the same time, community entrepreneurs will have more channels to distribute their products. This program will start piloting in three provinces, namely Samut Prakan, Chachoengsao and Chonburi, which are expected to begin in January.

All these government projects aim to introduce modern technology, under Pracharat model, to both public and private sectors to help corners adjust their businesses and maximize their strong points to better compete with modern shops.

This transformation cannot be completed only with the Government’s effort. The store owners must make adjustments as well. In particular, increasing the knowledge and understanding of the use of technology to benefit their business.

This includes understanding and the needs of today customers and building upon business’ strengths. The advantage of corner shops is the ability to sale in small number/amount such as rice and small snacks.

They are also visited by regular customers or even offering product “credit,” as opposed to conventional promotions. If we try to build upon this strength, I believe that everyone can build a better business.

I would like to give example of corner stores that have continued to adapt, called “Big Tae” at Thammasat University Rangsit. The store has always carried out their research on customer’s favorite products as well as what products are currently in demand.

This is also a consigned products from students to boost student income. This 2-way benefit was able to attract regular customers. Another is “Ji Choi” around Chulalongkorn University. The store is unique. It offers all kinds of products. If they don’t have it, but the customer asks for it, they will find such product for the customer immediately with a slight cost added. This is a unique feature of this store. Another is “Lor Yaowarat” which renovated from being an overly cramped store to a bright store with dark walls to distinguish its items.

Most importantly, the shop must operate on regular business hours for customers to be able to rely on. Cleanliness is also a priority. I want these examples to be “fruit for thought” for making a change.

The Government is ready to provide support in terms of coordination, unionization, education, and technological adoption. We must move forward together so that we can eventually become a “Thailand 4.0” nation. This journey starts at each and every one of us.

Thank you, and I wish you all good health and safe journey. I hope that all families are joyful.

Sawasdee krub.