

Conflicts and Politics Associated with the 2011 Thailand Flood

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INTRODUCTION

Floods involve not only technical issues such as identifying the causes, developing and implementing disaster control measures, and water resource management; they also involve issues of profit and loss distribution, with decisions related to when and how sacrifices, compensation, and relief are assigned to whom (Kasian 2011). The 2011 Thailand floods involved not only a people's fight against water, but also involved many cases of conflict among people. Amid the floods, people sought scapegoats for the causes of the floods, claiming that the disaster was beyond imagination to evade blame. They argued about which communities should face the force of the river overflow. Fierce conflicts related to guidance of the flood flows to one community or another erupted particularly between Bangkok and neighboring provinces, and within Bangkok, between the left and right banks of the Chao Phraya River and on the left bank between the Phra Nakhon Area and the eastern area. Heated arguments arose in relation to short-, medium-, and long-term flood control measures, involving issues such as whether to build a dam in an upstream area or not, where in a midstream area to place a retarding

basin, whether to build a ring levee around entire industrial estates and urban areas to prevent water inflow in the downstream delta area or not, and who is responsible for undertaking their design and construction. Regarding the issue of aid for flood victims, community neighbors disputed who should receive *ex gratia* and compensatory payments.

Disputes associated with the floods in various aspects intensified while involving political conflicts. The general election held in July 2011, immediately before the flooding, was won by the Phuea Thai Party, which replaced the government of the Democrat Party. The Democrat Party, however, is strong in Bangkok, which is the only province in which the governor is elected by popular vote.

In addition to such government division according to differing national and metropolitan administrations, conflicts had intensified because of clashes between the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD; commonly known as the Yellow Shirts) and the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD; commonly known as the Red Shirts). Dr. Nidhi Eoseewong, the most respected intellectual in modern Thailand, lamented that the opposition party politicians attempted to regain power by using the victims' hardships as a stepping stone, with the mass media keeping in step with such politicians rather than uniting to fight against the national crisis of flood reflected the situation of the Thai society that had been divided for the prior four or five years. All TV stations broadcasted the image of the disaster-stricken area when downtown Ayutthaya was inundated on October 7. As the disaster unfolded, the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) ran the caption twice that the "Chao Phraya River punished the UDD," which had been sent through a social message service (SMS) from a viewer. Dr. Nidhi

criticized this statement and added that “if we acknowledged that Thais lacked a sense of brotherhood, we could understand the disgraceful incidents happening in Thailand such as the person who had sent the SMS message, the TV station employee who had opted to broadcast the message, people rushing to stock up food, the Bangkok middle-class people who had cried over the burnt-down theaters and shopping centers rather than dead bodies (in May 2010), people demanding loyalty to individuals rather than to the institution, and judges prioritizing criminal law over the Constitution” (Nidhi 2011, information in parentheses was added by the author).

Discussion in this chapter is limited to conflicts that erupted when the flooding occurred, during the recovery process, and during the reconstruction planning. For the central government and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), the ruling party and opposition party, and residents inside and outside the ring levee, this examination elucidates how those people were involved in the ensuing conflicts. Based on these observations, we will attempt to understand Thai society and help predict how the people would react to any recurrence of flooding.

1. CONFLICTS OVER FLOOD CAUSES

When the flooding occurred in 2011, a conspiracy of the Democrat Party was rumored among the ruling party supporters and the UDD. They suspected that the Democrat Party had handed over the Phumiphon Dam and Sirikit Dam, intentionally filled with large amounts of water, to the Yingluck Shinawatra administration, which would take

office in August. When the campaign for the July general election started in May, the Democrat Party ruling the country since December 2008 had predicted their defeat and planned to place the new Phuea Thai Party administration in a difficult position. Somsak Ciamthirasakun, a prominent left-wing intellectual of Thailand, posted on Facebook that the opponent would not be sufficiently clever to plot such a large scheme and denied conspiracy theories (Somsak 2011). Nevertheless, that suspicion of negligence, if not outright malicious intent, remained. Although the proximate cause of the flood was heavy rainfalls, many suspected that excessive dam water storage and delayed discharge had caused the flood level to increase. The eye of suspicion was consequently directed to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), which was responsible for dam management, and the Royal Irrigation Department (RID), the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives responsible for the management of rivers and waterways.

1.1 Explanation by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand

The president of EGAT provided an explanation at the beginning of November (*Bangkok Post*, Nov. 3, 2011). In addition, EGAT distributed a document titled “The Truth about Discharge at Phumiphon and Sirikit Dams” to answer five questions. First, dam management was conducted by a sub-committee (Sub-committee to monitor and analyze dam water dosage) comprising the director-general of RID as the chairperson and members selected from eight organizations other than RID. EGAT conducted its activities based on decisions made by this sub-committee. Secondly, the start of discharge had been delayed because of the low water storage level of the Phumiphon

Dam and Sirikit Dam, which were at 45.1% and 50.3%, respectively, before the start of the rainy season. Since June, however, northern Thailand was hit by a series of low-pressure systems that brought heavy rainfalls on both the upper and lower sides of the dams, causing flooding in many areas. Additionally, because the tributaries, the Wang River and Yom River, had no large dams and the water level was rising, further rise had to be prevented. Discharge from the two dams could not be increased. Thirdly, discharge to reduce the water level was conducted in October for the Phumiphon Dam and during August–September for the Sirikit Dam. Fourthly, the criticism that the water storage had been increased intentionally to increase the amount of generated power is unfounded because the system does not allow an increase in profit even if the amount of power generated increases. Finally, why does the reduced discharge at the dams not help control the flooding? As of October 29, the amount discharged from the dams comprised only 16.7% of the amount flowing in Nakhon Sawan Province. The discharge from the two dams was therefore not the *cause* of the flood. In addition, the two dams stored water during July–August to prevent flooding in the Central Region. The inflow far exceeded the amount discharged. Without this water storage, the damage by the floods would have been more severe. It takes almost two weeks for the water discharged from the two dams to reach Bangkok. The amount discharged from the dams therefore did not affect the water mass that surrounded Bangkok at the end of October (EGAT 2011).

If, however, the water flowing out from the two dams had taken two weeks to reach Bangkok as claimed by EGAT, the amounts discharged on October 5 and 20 would have reached Bangkok around October 19 and November 3, respectively. The amount of water flooding into Bangkok increased in late October. The water discharged from

Phumiphon Dam evidently comprised part of the water mass flooded into the new delta area. If it comprised 16.7%, the water level would be raised from, for example, 3 meters to 3.6 meters, which would have been sufficient to make the swelling rivers overflow.

1.2 Explanation by the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives

On October 28, 2011, the Minister of Finance stated on his Facebook page that “the limited discharge from the dams resulted from the need to prepare for the third rice cropping. A change to double cropping from November through July and leaving the paddy fields fallow from August to October would allow an increase in discharge from the dams, eliminating the need to increase the amount of storage. ... The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives has been encouraging double cropping earlier. The reason is that it facilitates water management and can enrich the soil by growing crops such as beans. It was not part of the government policy, however, and could not be enforced. Forcing double cropping would require compensation to the farmers. This would not exceed 7 billion baht per year. The fallow paddy fields could be used as retarding basins” (Thirachai 2011).

The Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Theera Wongsamut, held the key. He had started his career in RID and was eventually promoted to the director-general of RID in 2007. In the Democrat Party administration that took office in December 2008, he assumed the position of the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives under the quota of the party led by Banhan Sinlapa-acha, Former Prime Minister elected from Suphan Buri Province. Without running for the 2011 general election, he remained in the position

even under the Yingluck Shinawatra administration. Theera was a convenient person for Banhan who was unable to take a seat in the cabinet because of a court decision of party dissolution. First, water is controlled in the delta area by RID using the waterway network. The former prime minister was influential in the delta area, and water management helps vote collection. Secondly, Theera is an expert in water resource management. Thirdly, Theera did not have his own political power base and was obedient to Banhan, allowing the former prime minister to act as *de facto* minister.

According to the statement of an opposition party member of the House of Representatives, the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives instructed RID on September 5 to cooperate with EGAT and reduce the amount discharged from Phumiphon Dam. Furthermore, the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives visited Ayutthaya Province with the former prime minister on September 8 and instructed the officials of RID to prevent flooding (*Matichon*, Nov. 10, 2011). When questioned in Parliament in November 2011, the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives admitted that the delayed discharge from the dams had contributed to the floods, but explained that dam management was being conducted according to the rules. He stated that Northern Thailand had received heavy rainfalls since June and that the river water increased. Water could not be discharged from the Sirikit Dam because a discharge when water levels were increasing would cause flooding. It was true also that the minister instructed officials to reduce discharge from the Phumiphon Dam in September because it had to wait for the farmers in the central region to complete their rice harvest activities (*The Nation*, Nov. 11, 2011). In 2011, the amount of water flowing into the dam was twice as much as the average. Without the Phumiphon Dam, flooding would have been

more severe. Theera stated that “no one made a mistake, so I suggest that we stop searching for the offender. If there was a mistake, it was me, the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, who could not make accurate predictions like Zhuge Liang and foresee the conditions” (*Thai Rat*, Nov. 12, 2011). The rules for storage and discharge of dam water were revised in 2012 to reduce storage levels, which attests to the possibility of negligence or incompetence in dam management.

2. CONFLICTS OVER RESPONSES TO THE FLOODS

The water flowing out of rivers and waterways and flowing down from upstream to downstream areas stopped flowing when it reached Bangkok. It was blocked by the ring levees extending dozens of kilometers. This eventuality triggered intense conflicts between the Bangkok residents inside the ring levees and residents of neighboring provinces outside the levees. The residents in the area that suddenly became a dam reservoir and those forced to be submerged in water of more than two-meter depth, along with the government demanded that BMA takes action to let the water into the capital and drain it to the sea. BMA, however, stubbornly refused to obey. When the water depth and pressure increased, the levees collapsed, and water began to flow in, large sandbags were placed to block the water again. This caused the upstream area to remain submerged for approximately two months.

2.1 Flood Control Measures of Bangkok: Building Ring Levees

Only Bangkok defended itself successfully thanks to its flood control measures. A report published by the Department of Drainage and Sewerage, BMA states that the King of Thailand played an important role in measures taken by Bangkok. After the floods in 1980, the King indicated basic guidelines to direct the water in the capital to the sea through the eastern area. More specifically, the plan was to raise Romklao Road and Kingkaew Road in the eastern area of Bangkok to build a floodwall extending 72 kilometers and place drainage facilities at 42 locations to use the outside of the floodwall as a floodway. Urban expansion in the eastern area would be prevented by building a green belt in Lat Krabang District and Min Buri District in the east, which would also be used as a floodway (BMA-DDS 2010, p.43).

Before putting this plan into practice, massive floods struck Bangkok in 1983. The eastern area remained submerged for three months. Therefore, the King's Dyke was built: it stands approximately 2 meters above sea level and extends from Bang Khen District in the north to Khlong Dan at the coast in Samut Prakan Province. The King's Dyke was subsequently raised to 2.5 meters and reinforced. The eastern area outside the floodwall includes large expanses of agricultural land requiring irrigation water, for which RID controls water. In the eastern area, BMA and RID collaborated in 2006 in construction to raise the water control and drainage capacity of the main waterway running east-west (BAM-DDS 2010, pp.102-5).

BMA also took measures in riverside areas. The project included the building of floodwalls standing 2.5 meters above sea level on both sides of the Chao Phraya River

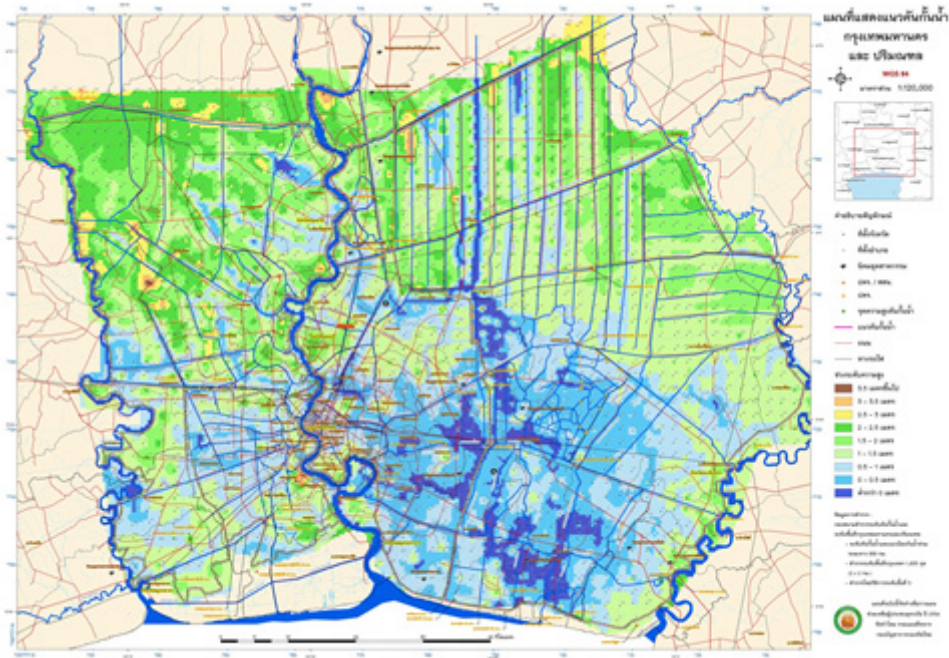
and also along the Mahasawat Canal bordering the northern part of Thonburi Area on the right bank. The total length would be 77 kilometers, with construction expected to be completed in 2010. After its completion, Bangkok would have been able to cope with, to a large degree, the level of a flood rising up to 2.27 meters above sea level, which had been recorded in 1995 (BMA-DDS, 2010, pp.107-9). In addition to such measures for prevention of water inflow from the outside, BMA placed 685 pumps at 150 facilities and had constructed seven underground drainage tunnels with drainage capacity of 155.5 cubic meters per second and a total length of 19.13 kilometers as of 2009 to drain water from Bangkok promptly. Three new drainage tunnels with total length of 26.20 kilometers and capacity of 160 cubic meters per second were under construction (BMA-DDS 2010, pp.111-13).

The flood control of BMA was based on two measures, i.e., drainage of rainwater from the city and prevention of inflow from the outside. Water flowing from the upstream area is directed to the floodway in the eastern area using floodgates and pumps and poured into the sea. In the Rangsit Area in Pathum Thani Province, waterways created in the new rice field development projects since the end of the nineteenth century run orderly north–south. In October 2011, Dr. Teerachon Manomaiphibul, Deputy Governor of Bangkok, responded to an interview in the northern area of Bangkok that BMA had closed the gates of Waterways No. 1 through No. 6 to prevent inflow into the central area and opened the gates of Waterways No. 6 through No. 13 to direct water to the floodway (Namphon and Mana 2012, p.43). The deputy governor stated that he had made three requests at a meeting of the Flood Relief Operations Center (FROC), which he had joined as the representative of BMA. One was to increase the pumps to be

installed. The second request was to open the gates of Waterways No. 6 through No. 13 completely. He requested that the gates be opened not only in the area north of Bangkok, but at areas further upstream. The gates of these north–south waterways were closed to protect the basin. They prevented the water from flowing southward. The deputy governor noted that the gates should have been opened before opening them had become difficult because of the rising water. The last request was to reinforce the sandbag levee at the junction (in front of Zeer Rangsit) of Phahonyothin Road and Vibhavadi Rangsit Road in the northernmost area of Bangkok. At this place in the proximity of Don Mueang Airport, sandbags that had been piled up by BMA were removed by someone during the night and water was about to enter the capital (Namphon and Mana 2012, pp. 84-85, 87). Teerachon Manomaiphikul recalled how water management was complicated by crowds led by politicians aiming for political effect, who would open the gates closed by BMA and remove the sandbags placed by BMA in an attempt to prevent water inflow (Namphon and Mana 2012, pp. 120-21).

The floodway in the eastern area had been proposed by the King and was also acknowledged by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Water did not enter the floodway in the eastern area and did not reach the Khlong Dan drainage gate during the 2011 floods. The reason is often explained that water was blocked because of housing land development and road construction. The coastal area, however, is approximately 90 centimeters above sea level because of the marine terrace and the area near Suwannaphum Airport on the north side is raised only about 50 centimeters. There is an area below sea level north of the airport. To direct water on such an uneven surface rising higher near the coast and into the sea, waterways must be created and water must

Figure 1 Maps around Bangkok Metropolitan Area



Source: http://WWW.risd.mi.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=169.

be pushed rather forcibly using floodgates and pumps (see Figure 1). Considering the lack of notable experience in such projects, however, the water would likely stagnate even with no obstacles.

This plan seems to have another weakness. The deputy governor claimed that pouring the water into the waterways running from north to south in the Rangsit Area would direct the water to the east of Bangkok. The water that swallowed the industrial estates in 2011, however, flowed down to the lower area in the west and south. This was more to the west of Waterway No. 7 located in Rangsit Area. It was natural that the water concentrated in the areas around Waterways No. 1 through No. 6. Directing the water that had stood there to the area east of Waterway No. 7 would defy gravity, which

was not easy. Water management was complicated further by water flooding out of the waterways, as occurred in 2011.

2.2 Conflicts of Residents

In 2011, floodgates were closed and sandbags were stacked to prevent the water mass that flooded into Bangkok from flowing southward and entering the city center. Not surprisingly, dissatisfaction of people involuntarily suffering from the flood waters increased as the period of submergence and depth of water mounted. When the water depth and pressure increased and water topped the levees and began to flow southward, the government hurriedly built floodwalls using large sandbags in response to the plea of metropolitan residents. These measures caused flooding in the north side again. The sandbag floodwalls that had been built in haste gave a clear impression of an artificial boundary between areas in which flooding had to be prevented and areas that could be left flooded. That line of segregation was far more stark and symbolic than the permanent embankments had been.

The residents outside the ring levee strongly opposed this project. Tensions increased. On October 30, 2011, residents of Khlong Sam Wa District on the east side demanded that the floodgates to Min Buri District on the south side be opened. However, no agreement was reached through negotiations. The residents subsequently destroyed the embankment near the floodgates by force (*Krungthep Thurakit*, Oct. 30, 2011). On the night of November 2, waterproof sandbags stacked at the dikes of the Khlong Prapha Canal broke at 13 locations and the muddy stream flowed into the water treatment plant

(*Krungthep Thurakit*, Nov. 2, 2011). On November 16, about 200 residents removed a 10-meter long wall of large sandbags at the intersection in front of the Directorate of Air Operations Control on Phahonyothin Road (*Matichon*, Nov. 16, 2011). At that same intersection, around 1,000 people gathered to remove large sandbags again on November 23, and did so by force when negotiations failed to reach an agreement (*Daily News*, Nov. 23, 2011).

On November 14, 2011, an article from someone using the pen name “Sandbag” was posted on a well-known online journal. The article stated that unlike natural disasters such as the earthquakes and tsunamis that had struck Japan in March of the same year, “flooding in Thailand flows from politically strong areas to weak areas rather than from high to low ground, as we learn in elementary science classes. Everyone knows this. ... The current floodwalls made of sandbags serve not only as a means of blocking water, but a boundary between the ‘areas that can be left flooded’ and ‘areas where flooding cannot be allowed.’ Consequently, the provinces surrounding Bangkok were made ‘flood control basins’ for Bangkok” (‘Krasopsai’ 2011).

The Bangkok residents considered that they naturally deserved that special treatment. Prawit Rotchanaphruk criticized in *The Nation* newspaper, “wealthy Bangkok residents are self-interested and accustomed to enjoying privileges. They have little interest in the damage inflicted on the residents outside the floodwalls and gates and expect that the center of the capital will be protected. ... Wealthy Bangkok residents can evacuate by car and stay at hotels in resorts like Hua Hin and Pattaya that charge more than 10,000 baht per night. ... Some wealthier people have taken vacations outside Thailand to avert their eyes from the reality that one-third of the country is flooded”

(Prawit 2011). Supalak Ganjanakhundee from *The Nation* raised a fundamental question on Twitter on November 20 about the claim that the center of the capital must be protected because its economic value is substantially higher than that of other regions. “The opinion that flooding in the center of the capital would cause severe damage is terribly false because, in Thailand (in fact for the world, too), important production facilities are located in the surrounding areas. The largest rice- farming area is the submerged land in Central Thailand. Facilities manufacturing industrial components supplied worldwide are also located in the outskirts of the capital. What is the damage to be prevented (that might occur in the city)? All of the Don Mueang Airport, the government buildings (in the urban sub-center of Nonthaburi Province), and agricultural and industrial production facilities have already been inundated. What are we trying to protect? What we are trying to protect is the prestige of the winner in the unequal society” (Supalak 2011, notes in parentheses were added by the author).

2.3 Conflicts between the Ruling Party and Opposition Party

Conflicts between the ruling and opposition parties are important in relation to the central government. The governor of Bangkok is a politician in the opposition Democrat Party. The Democrat Party has a majority in the Bangkok Metropolitan Council and District Councils. The Democrat Party won 23 of 33 seats excluding the eastern area (and one district in the central area) in the general election held in July 2011. Thonburi Area on the west bank was quickly inundated by the 2011 floods. The Governor of Bangkok, however, attempted to protect the central area to the last.

In an attempt to increase residents' support using the floods as a failure of the ruling party, the Democrat Party repeatedly criticized the government's responses knowing that BMA was hampering the government's flood control measures. The Democrat Party released the following statement on October 27. The measures taken by the government were inappropriate scientifically, empirically, and topographically. A study done by the Democrat Party indicated three pathways to drain flood water as quickly as possible. The first was a western route that would use the Tha Chin River. The second was the central route that would use the Chao Phraya River flowing in the center of Bangkok. The last was the eastern route that would use the Bang Pakong River. The government's drainage project was inefficient because of a lack of balance among the three routes. The eastern route was particularly a problem. Drainage through the eastern route was neglected despite the drain pumps that had been prepared, and it was only several days earlier that the pumps had begun to be used. The Chao Phraya River was consequently made the major drain route, although its water level had already begun rising. Such inadequate responses caused the prolonged submergence of the metropolitan area (*Prachathai*, Oct. 28, 2011).

On the same day, October 27, the opinions of Pramot Maiklat, Former Director-General of RID, were released. He stated, "some claim that water gathers in the west bank area of the Chao Phraya River because the floodgates of the eastern routes are not opened. However, we must see how the condition of the site is. The elevation of Chachoengsao Province is higher than that of Bangkok, and the tide level of the sea is higher than the water level of the floodways. Because of this, the floodgates must be closed to prevent water from flowing into Bangkok from the neighboring areas. BMA

maybe does not understand the paths of water and is having trouble solving the problems” (*Prachathai*, Oct. 28, 2011).

The director-general of RID expressed the following on October 29 about conflict with BMA. BMA would not allow water into the city, “but is attempting to have RID direct the water to the east side. BMA, however, should direct the water into the Lat Phrao Canal using high-performance facilities that can drain 215 cubic meters per second. BMA should let some of the water into Bangkok. Why do they try to direct the water only to the eastern area? The underground canals constructed by BMA have high capacity to drain water. In the current situation, the water should be guided to anywhere possible. BMA is trying to direct the criticism only to RID” (*Matichon*, Oct. 30, 2011).

Satellite pictures indicate that the downstream area of the Bang Pakong River on the east side was flooded in September before Bangkok and the flood continued into October. By late October, not only the east side, but other areas around Bangkok were flooded, making the capital look like an island floating in a large lake. Among the supporters of the Phuea Thai Party and UDD, criticism spread that “the Phuea Thai Party was afraid of Bangkok residents who had not voted for the Phuea Thai Party more than the majority who had voted for them,” and “support of provincial residents who had voted for the ruling party may be lost. The support of Bangkok’s majority who had not voted for the ruling party could not be acquired” (Pitch 2011).

3. CONFLICTS OVER VICTIM SUPPORT

Two major issues related to the aid for flood victims included a uniform solatium of 5,000 baht based on the Cabinet decision and compensation of tens of thousands of baht according to the extent of damage based on the “Ministry of Finance rules for advancing the emergency allowance for disaster victims (2003).”

Subsidies in addition to these two were also provided. Collecting donations to support disaster victims is regulated by the “Office of the Prime Minister’s rules of 2004.” This aid fund held a meeting on September 23, 2011 and chose to provide the surviving family members of deceased victims of disasters since July 25 of the same year with 50,000 baht for funeral expenses and those whose houses had been completely destroyed with 240,000 baht. As of October 25 of that year, a total of 437.74 million baht had been provided for the funeral expenses for 356 persons, aid of 50.92 million baht for reconstruction of 138 completely destroyed houses, purchase of relief supplies amounting to 325.82 million baht for the victims, and subsidies of 61 million baht for other supporting organizations (*Matichon*, Oct. 28, 2011). By December 18 of the same year, the total aid actually paid amounted to 450 million baht, including funeral expenses for 698 deceased victims, construction of 181 completely destroyed houses, and the purchase of 5,000 small boats.

BMA announced on February 6, 2012, that donations of approximately 28 million baht given by China and Japan would be distributed to 617 communities according to the level of damage. The amount was 30,000 baht for a flooding period of 7–14 days, 40,000 baht for 15–30 days, and 50,000 baht for 30 days or more (*Thai Rat*, Feb. 6, 2012). An

announcement was made on February 28 to notify an increase of eligible communities to 623 and a plan to start the payment on March 2, 2013 (*Krungthep Thurakit*, Feb. 28, 2012).

3.1 Solatium of 5,000 baht for flood victims

At the cabinet meeting held on September 6, 2011, the Yingluck Shinawatra administration approved the proposal of the Ministry of the Interior for paying a solatium of 5,000 baht per household for flood victims and decided to allocate 780 million baht from the reserve fund of the fiscal year 2011 budget. For Bangkok, the Cabinet decided at the meeting held on November 8, 2011, to provide 3 billion baht for 600,000 households in response to the request of BMA (*Krungthep Thurakit*, Nov. 9, 2011). In response to the aggravated damage at the downstream delta area, the government decided to increase the aid to 11.45 billion baht for 2.29 million households nationwide at the Cabinet meeting of November 15, 2011 (*Krungthep Thurakit*, Dec. 1, 2011). Furthermore, at the Cabinet meeting of January 31, 2012, the government decided to increase the aid by 2,340 million baht for 468,000 households in Bangkok and 1,370 million baht for 273,000 households in 53 provinces.

The payments tended to be delayed. According to the director-general of the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM), the Ministry of the Interior who spoke on December 23, 2011, payments to 390,000 out of 2,290,000 households had been completed (*Krungthep Thurakit*, Dec. 23, 2011). The report at the Cabinet meeting of January 24, 2012, indicated that, out of 2,910,000 households in 62 provinces,

1,387,000 households had been inspected and a total of 5,220 million baht had been paid to 1,044,000 households. The Deputy Government Spokesman, Chalit Chantharubeksa, reported that as of February 11, 2012, payments to 1,460,000 out of 2,910,000 households eligible for the aid had been completed (*Matichon*, Feb. 13, 2012). The deputy government spokesman announced on February 28, 2012 that 784,000 households, located mostly in Bangkok, had yet to receive aid (*Matichon*, Feb. 28, 2012).

The amount of this solatium was uniform and did not cause disputes and severe conflicts among neighboring households. The only apparent problem was the delay in the payments. Fierce conflicts, however, resulted from the compensation program described hereinafter.

3.2 The 2003 Ministry of Finance Rules for Disaster Benefits

3.2.1 Legal provisions

The Ministry of Finance established the “Ministry of Finance rules for advancing the emergency allowance for disaster victims (2003)” using the 1959 Budget Law as the base law. Based on these rules, the Ministry of Finance enacted in 2008 “the standards and methods of supporting emergency disaster victims” (the 2008 Standards and Methods). These benefits would not necessarily be distributed to all flood victims. Moreover, the amount was not fixed.

Based on the 2008 Standards and Methods, the types of damage eligible for the benefits were broadly divisible into three: (1) threat to health and life, (2) loss in

agriculture and fisheries, and (3) damage to housing and household goods. The following describes the first category, threat to health and life. For health damage, (1) 3,000 baht was given if an injury required 3-day or longer hospitalization and treatment, with an additional 2,000 baht per person per month until discharge from hospital if hospitalization for 30 days or more was required, (2) a lump sum of 10,000 baht and 2,000 baht per person per month for up to two years if disabilities resulting from the disaster prevented normal work, and (3) a solatium of 2,000 baht or less per person was to be paid to injured and treated victims if residents suffered severe psychological trauma from a large-scale disaster. Moreover, 25,000 baht per person would be considered to cover funeral expenses for any deceased victims, with addition of no more than 25,000 baht if the deceased was the head of a household or an income-earner.

3.2.2 Compensation for damage to agriculture and fisheries

According to the 2008 Standards and Methods, compensation for agricultural damage would be paid only to those farmers who had registered their crops at the Department of Agricultural Extension, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives before the disaster struck. If crops withered, the compensation would be provided for the cost of seeds for 100% of damaged area for crops with a short growing period and cost of seedlings for 25% of damaged area for fruit trees, and additionally, the cost of agrochemicals and fertilizers that would promote growth of crops for 50% of cultivation area, cost of agrochemicals and fertilizers for 50% of cultivation area if crops did not wither but only problems occurred in their growth, expenses necessary to restore the ability to grow crops with a short growing period in an area no more than five *rai* (one rai

= 1,600 square meter) if farmland was buried under earth and sand preventing cultivation, and 50% of transportation expenses if farming machinery and crops were moved to avoid the flood damage.

In addition, expenses for farmland restoration and improvement to resume farming, embankment repair, recovery of irrigation facilities, and transportation for the evacuation of livestock that were actually incurred would be reimbursed.

How much money was actually paid? Until 2009, the subsidies per area of one *rai* when crops had withered because of disaster were 606 baht for rice, 837 baht for dry field crops, and 912 baht for fruit trees. Compensation of 287 baht per *rai* was to be paid for any growth disorder caused by disaster.

Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra decided at the Cabinet meeting held on August 30, 2011, soon after the start of her administration to calculate 55% of actual expenses incurred as the compensation for agricultural damage and increase the amount from that in 2010 under the Democrat Party administration. The total amount was 8.2 billion baht (see Table 1). The amount of compensation per *rai* was 2,222 baht for rice, 3,150 baht for dry field crops, 5,098 baht for fruit trees, and 2,549 baht for growth disorder. For aquaculture, too, compensation was raised to 4,225 baht (up from 3,406 baht) per *rai* up to five *rai* for fish farming, 10,920 baht (up from 9,098 baht) for shrimp / crab / shellfish farming, and 315 baht (up from 257 baht) per square meter up to 80 square meters for small-scale farming (*Matichon*, Aug. 30, 2011).

Furthermore, the prime minister decided at the Cabinet meeting on September 27, 2011, to (1) supply 10 kilograms of seed rice per *rai* up to 10 *rai* and (2) pay 1,437 baht per ton of rice with inferior quality as a result of flood damage. The government

expected to pay a total of 7.3 billion baht for this measure, of which 6.5 billion baht would be paid for the latter (inferior rice) (*Bangkok Post*, Sep. 27, 2011).

Table 1 Compensation for Farmers

	(Unit : Baht/rai)		
	2009	2010	2011
For totally-damaged crops			
Rice	606	2,098	2,222
Field crops	837	2,921	3,150
Fruits	912	4,908	5,098
For partly-damaged crops	287	2,454	2,549

Source: Compiled by the author.

3.2.3 Compensation for damage to housing and household effects

The 2008 Standards and Methods specified compensation such as food expenses of no more than 30 baht per person per day, emergency food and supplies worth no more than 500 baht per household, kitchenware and drinking water expenses of no more than 3,500 baht per household, repair expenses of no more than 20,000 baht for partially destroyed houses, reconstruction expenses of no more than 30,000 baht for completely destroyed houses, repair expenses of no more than 3,000 baht for partially destroyed warehouses and barns, repair expenses of no more than 8,000 baht for completely destroyed warehouses and barns, lighting expenses of no more than 200 baht per household during evacuation, housing expenses of no more than 100 baht per day per household, house rent of no more than 1,500 baht per month per household up to two

months for a house rented because of total or partial destruction of the victims' own residence, no more than 2,000 baht per household to improve temporary evacuation shelters or construction expenses of no more than 4,000 baht per household for evacuation shelters, no more than 800 baht per household to purchase clothes and plastic sheets to shelter from rain, no more than 1,000 baht for two pieces of clothing per person, no more than 1,000 baht for two sets of school uniforms for students, no more than 500 baht per person for bedding, a leave allowance (tools and funds to earn a living) of no more than 10,000 baht per household, and moving expenses of no more than 5,000 baht necessitated by disaster.

For the 2011 floods, five categories including completely and partially destroyed houses, leave allowance, house rent, lighting expenses, and funeral expenses and three additional categories including clothing, kitchenware, and bedding expenses were specified as the standards for calculating the amount of compensation. The compensation for damage to residences triggered particularly intense conflicts. Victims would report damage and apply for subsidies. Officials of local government or district office would inspect the level of damage, based on which the amount would be determined. DDPM was responsible for the procedures, and a committee was placed in each province.

Applications were closed first in December 2011 and subsequently accepted again in April 2012. Data of DDPM as of December 22, 2011, indicated that completely destroyed houses were 1,158 and that compensation of 6,570,000 baht had been paid to 228 houses, or 19.7%, and partially destroyed houses totaled 203,000 and that compensation of 17.75 million baht had been paid to 2,654 households, or 1.3%. At the time, no report from Bangkok had been received. Subsequently, complaints about

application errors and amounts of subsidies continued to be filed. On July 18, 2012, the spokesperson of the Ministry of the Interior stated that subsidies had already been paid to 58 of 64 provinces and that only Bangkok and a total of 6 neighboring provinces remained. In Bangkok, approximately 200,000 applicants were requesting new subsidies even after the application deadline using omissions of reports as the reason (*Thai Rat*, July 18, 2012).

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Friction over the supply of compensation was particularly intense in Bangkok. In addition, to the residents' dissatisfaction with insufficient amounts and inequality, the issue involved conflicts between the ruling and opposition parties and between the central government and BMA. The application deadline for the 5,000 baht solatium and compensation in the five categories in Bangkok was February 29, 2012. BMA announced on March 6 that 610,000 applicants had sought to receive the solatium and that applications for compensation included 16 completely destroyed houses, 149 partially destroyed houses, 382 households for house rent, 11,141 cases of compensation for absence from work, and 105 cases of funeral expenses. Because flood victims who had yet to apply for the compensation remained and because inspection and document preparation were time-consuming, the application deadline of March 10 specified by DDPM could not be met. A 90-day extension of the deadline was planned (*Daily News*, Mar. 7, 2012). BMA reported that 440 million baht had been paid by the end of April for house repair, house rent subsidies, leave allowance, and 64 funerals (*The Nation*, May 1, 2012). A deputy governor of Bangkok indicated at the end of May that Bangkok had

requested that the government allow an additional budget of 1,220 million baht for 2 completely destroyed houses, 108,111 partially destroyed houses, 308 cases of house rent, 9,675 cases of compensation for absence from work, and 79 cases for funeral expenses (*The Nation*, May 30, 2012). Dr. Teerachon Manomaiphibul, another Deputy Governor of Bangkok, spoke on July 16 to explain that BMA had already requested DDPM on July 12 to extend the application deadline for compensation for flood damage, provide a uniform benefit of 20,000 baht for completely and partially destroyed houses, add aid for the three categories of clothing, kitchenware, and bedding expenses, and add a budget necessary for the additional aid (*Daily News*, July 16, 2012). On July 17, 2012, approximately 1,000 people in Bang Khen District in the northern part of Bangkok blocked National Highway Route 1 and approximately 300 people in Bang Khae District in the western part of the capital blocked National Highway Route 4 and created traffic jams. They demanded the financial support for reconstruction of completely and partially destroyed houses to be a uniform amount of 20,000 baht, rather than a range up to 20,000 baht, and that compensation for cases yet to be applied for be accepted as new applications (*Bangkok Post*, July 18, 2012).

In an interview at 10:00 a.m. on July 18, the spokesman of the Ministry of the Interior responded to requests successively made by BMA and Bangkok residents. Their essential contents were the following.

(1) The deadline for the application for compensation was in December 2011, which was extended to April 2012. Cases of application error amounted to more than 200,000 in Bangkok and neighboring areas. Although new applications were accepted, the reason for the delayed application required an explanation. (2) Housing restoration benefits in

the amount of 20,000 baht could not be paid to all households. Because Bangkok has its own budgets as a local government, if a promise for payment was made with the crowd of protesters, its own budgets should be used to make such payment. (3) The request for support provided in eight categories rather than five categories could not be met. In 58 provinces, payments had been completed using five categories. (4) Some local politicians had mobilized residents and organized movements, which should be stopped (*Krungthep Thurakit*, July 18, 2012).

In response to the answer of “no” given by the Ministry of the Interior, Deputy Governor Teerachon stated on July 18 that BMA had completed the payments of compensation in 32 of 36 districts using 2 billion baht provided by the government, and that any additional budget allocation would help complete the remaining payments. A Democrat Party member of Parliament suggested that compensation for flood victims in Bangkok was limited to the five categories possibly as a political tactic for the gubernatorial election planned for 2013 (*Bangkok Post*, July 19, 2012). Democrat Party members of Parliament visited the Minister of the Interior on July 20 to find solutions to the conflict over compensation. The Democrat Party made the following two demands. First, give the governor the authority to determine the minimum amount of compensation. Calculation of damage is increasingly difficult and dissatisfaction with different amounts among neighbors is increasing, leaving the officials unable to determine the amounts. Therefore, how about setting the upper limit to 20,000 baht and the lower limit to 10,000 baht and performing strict assessment for amounts exceeding 10,000 baht? The minimum guarantee should ease the conflicts and reduce the pressure on the government. Secondly, application should be permitted to those who have forgotten to apply. Like the

residents of other provinces, support payments for bedding, clothing, and kitchenware expenses should be available to Bangkok residents. After this meeting, the Minister of the Interior announced that the minimum guarantee of 10,000 baht and an additional application period of five days would be considered (*Krungthep Thurakit*, July 20, 2012).

After an executive meeting at BMA on July 23, 2012, the spokesperson made the following announcement. BMA had already paid a total of 1,171 million baht as compensation for disaster victims to 122,908 applicants. A uniform amount of 20,000 baht as support for housing reconstruction could not be provided. “Some politicians tell residents that the 20,000 baht proposal would be accepted, which causes trouble at the district office acting as a contact point. BMA has never stated that it would pay a uniform amount of 20,000 to all applicants. Those who have been speaking of such payment are not the officials of BMA (*Krungthep Thurakit*, July 23, 2012).

Subsequently, friction continued in Bangkok. Approximately fifty residents of Lat Phrao and Khlong Sam Wa Districts in Bangkok rushed to the Office of the Prime Minister on July 24, 2012, and complained that the amounts of compensation calculated by BMA were inappropriate and that the payment was slow (*Matichon*, July 24, 2012). The spokesperson of BMA announced on July 30, 2012 that DDPM had already approved an extension of the application period until August 10 for compensation for flood victims in Bangkok, and the payment for this was planned for completion by August 31. This was the result of 17,889 complaints about the amount of compensation and the 26,446 new applications for subsidies that remained unprocessed as of July 25. According to the spokesperson, BMA had already paid compensation of 1,180 million

baht and had prepared 63 million baht in response to the request for an increase made by 14,440 applicants (*Krungthep Thurakit*, July 30, 2012).

In response to the explanation of the Governor of Bangkok that the payment of compensation for flood victims was delayed by the Ministry of the Interior, which would not distribute the budget that Bangkok had requested, the Minister of the Interior objected at an interview on September 21, 2012 that BMA was to blame for failing to follow the rules and observe application deadlines, unlike the residents of other provinces. The director-general of DDPM explained the background. BMA proposed that 753 million baht remaining from the budget for compensation distributed by the government be used to support flood victims. DDPM responded that the funds must be returned first to the government according to the rules of the Ministry of the Interior. BMA, then, requested an additional budget of 1 billion baht. BMA must comply with the rules, return the unused 753 million baht, and explain the use of the additional budget before the application deadline of June 24. DDPM notified BMA twice that details must be explained before September 20. However, no response had been received as of September 21 (*Daily News*, Sept. 21, 2012).

The conflicts intensified in October. A ruling party member of Parliament, acting as a spokeswoman, criticized BMA on October 20 as follows: “The government has already distributed 2 billion baht to BMA for the compensation for flood victims. BMA, however, left 800 million baht unused. When residents ask for a solatium, BMA places the blame on the government despite the failure of BMA to equally distribute the benefits. The act of BMA to retain the 800 million baht without distributing it to the Bangkok residents or returning it to the Ministry of the Interior is misconduct. Where

has the 800 million baht disappeared to?” (*Thai Rat*, Oct. 20, 2012).

This dispute would be settled at the end of December 2012. On December 27, a ruling party member elected from Bangkok asked the prime minister at Parliament, “Who was responsible for the calculation of unequal amounts of benefits for flood victims and delayed distribution?” One of the deputy prime ministers (Minister of Foreign Affairs) responded in place of the prime minister. “The government approved the budget allocation of 1,142 million baht on December 20. It was the budget for the compensation for 47,522 applicants requesting an increase and 128,517 applicants who had previously failed to apply. This makes the total amount of compensation provided to BMA by the government 3,108 million baht. If BMA fails to complete the payments by December 31, the funds must be returned to DDPM, which will instead make the payments that would be delayed. BMA must therefore process the payments as soon as possible.”

Both the ruling and opposition parties, therefore, attempted to use the support for flood victims for the interest of their parties. The Bangkok gubernatorial election associated with the expiration of term was planned in 2013. The motives of the Democrat Party, attempting to retain the support of Bangkok residents, and the Phuea Thai Party, aiming to capture the governor’s seat, aggravated the conflicts. If someone complained that the compensation was insufficient, then the government and ruling party would criticize the inadequate calculation of the amount of damage by BMA on the one hand, and the BMA and opposition party would demand the government to increase the budget for compensation on the other hand. Some people had residents carry out protest activities. The government excluded aid for bedding, clothing, and kitchenware expenses

in Bangkok. If someone complained about delayed compensation payments, then while the government would criticize the negligence of BMA, BMA and opposition party attempted to lay the blame on the government's slow budget distribution. Political self-interest was apparently prioritized over support for flood victims in some respects.

4. FLOOD CONTROL MEASURES AND CONCERNS

4.1 Flood Control Measures

The government decided to place two committees at the Cabinet meeting held on November 8, 2011: the Strategic Committee for Reconstruction and Future Development (SCRF) and the Strategic Committee for Water Resource Management (SCWRM). Wiraphong Ramangkun, an economist who had been a Cabinet member of the Prem Tinsulanon administration, was appointed as the chairperson of the former, and Sumet Tantiwetchakun, the King's aide, was invited as an advisor to the latter. Both were close to General Prem, the President of the Privy Council, and were well respected. Sumet worked as the head of the Office of Special Committee for Coordination in the Projects Following Royal Ideas from 1981 to 1999, the age of his mandatory retirement. During that period, from 1994 to 1996, he concurrently served as the Secretary-General of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). He had been serving as the secretary-general of the Chaiphaththana Foundation, a nongovernmental organization related to the monarchy, since 1988. Sumet expressed soon after taking

office, “the King has been giving instructions on flood control for more than 30 years. The government therefore wants to learn the details from me because I have been serving His Majesty for many years” (*Matichon*, Nov. 10, 2011). He took the post of the advisor, acknowledging that the government intended to borrow the power and wisdom of the King. Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra had an audience with His Majesty on October 12, 2011, and received his advice on flood control measures, and on November 3, reconfirmed that the eastern area would be used as a floodway by following the advice of his Majesty. The words of the King gave an impression of absolute flawlessness that would not allow skepticism or criticism and compliance with them could mean a public good or protection, which were therefore beneficial in containing the persist criticism.

The Yingluck Shinawatra administration made preparations to prevent future floods in addition to the support and relief provided to the victims. Although the flood control measures are detailed in Sucharit (2015), the following briefly describes the conflicts and inadequacies associated with flood control measures. The basic policy for flood control measures was, in the upstream area, to store water through the effective use of dams while increasing the flood capacity of forests, in the midstream area, to specify a retarding basin and use it to control the flow during a flood, and in downstream areas, to prevent water entry by building ring levees.

4.1.1 Retarding basin: Midstream area

A retarding basin must be built in the midstream or downstream area to avoid a direct hit of excessive water flowing down from the upper stream until a dam is completed, or if a dam cannot be constructed. The Yingluck Shinawatra administration

decided at the Cabinet meeting held on June 4, 2012, to build floodwalls around six industrial estates and prepare retarding basins with the area of 2.1 million *rai* (*Bangkok Post*, June 5, 2012). Of these two, the retarding basin is a place to draw water in and store it temporarily to protect the industrial estates and cities downstream of Ayutthaya Province during the flooded season from September through November. A retarding basin was planned for construction in the midstream area from Uttaradit Province to Nakhon Sawan Province, in addition to one in the area from the new delta area, Chainat Province, to Ayutthaya Province. Seemingly going along with the plan, in Phichit Province, for instance, an area of 193,000 *rai* had been designated by May 2012 (*Bangkok Post*, May 17, 2012). Secretary of the Water and Flood Management Committee stated that the amount of compensation for paddy fields designated in July as a retarding basin as part of flood control measures would be announced in August (*The Nation*, July 26, 2012). RIDt began the development of flow channels to the retarding basins.

At the end of 2012, however, the method and amount of compensation for the retarding basin owners were yet to be determined. One rainy season had therefore passed without such decisions. An economist, Dr. Apichat Sathitniramai, remarked in a seminar, “if a certain housing area is designated as a retarding basin, the extent of compensation must be determined in advance. Such decisions, however, have never been made. If you were a resident of a retarding basin and there were no guarantee whatsoever as to how much compensation for damage you would receive after a flood has receded, you would probably destroy the sandbags” (*Prachathai*, Nov. 9, 2012). Such a situation of housing land is likely to be the same for farmland. Farmers are no longer silent subjects of the

nation. Failure to determine the compensation would leave the possibility for farmers to refuse submergence, which only suggests a lack of responsibility.

4.1.2 Building ring levees: Downstream area

Particularly important areas downstream of Ayutthaya Province are the industrial estates and Bangkok. Floodwalls were constructed for the industrial estates. For Bangkok, on the other hand, Wiraphong explained in response to questions at Parliament in September 2012, “if the water were divisible into three, the burden would be one-third. First, water on the west bank on the Thonburi side goes through Suphan Buri Province and Nakhon Pathom Province and flows into the Tha Chin River. The waterway was left unattended for a long time and dredging has been neglected. A budget must be allocated to dredge the river. Secondly, water should be controlled and guided inside Bangkok. We would like the governor to approve the use of Bangkok as the water pathway. We want to direct the water to pass through the Rangsit Canal, Bang Sue Canal, and Lat Phrao Canal. We would also like to improve the floodgates. The budget for improving each floodgate would be 500 million baht. Thirdly, the eastern area is elevated high above sea level, so the water must go through the Hok Wa Canal and Sam Wa Canal. The water will be sent to the Prawet Canal, Phra Khanong Canal, and Khlong Dan drainage gate. We will need large pumps to do this” (*Krungthep Thurakit*, Sept. 19, 2012).

This is a plan to use Bangkok as a passage while, in principle, building ring levees. BMA, however, persistently follows a policy of not letting water in the central area. BMA therefore strongly opposed to the government when it conducted tests to let water

pass through the waterways in the south of Ayutthaya Province to verify the effect of a series of flood control measures such as dredging and embankment reinforcement from August to September 2012. According to Royon Jitdorn, the Director of Hydro and Agro Informatics Institute, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the extent of water level rise associated with inflow of a certain amount of water must be assessed, particularly in the Lat Phrao Canal connecting to the city center, because this canal is the main waterway connecting to the underground tunnel that carries water to the Chao Phraya River. The director pointed out, “by October 2011, the flow of the Chao Phraya River in Bang Sai District of Ayutthaya Province, which was an alert observation point for Bangkok, had reached 5,000 cubic meters per second, exceeding the controllable limit of 3,500 cubic meters per second. ... The flood damage could be reduced if this excess were 1,500 cubic meters per second” (*Matichon*, Aug. 31, 2012).

The basic policy announced again on September 10, 2012, by Teerachon, the Deputy Governor of Bangkok, was as follows: Based on the guidelines given by the King, water will not be guided into the central area. On the outside of the King’s Dyke, Waterways No. 8 through No. 13 will be used to guide water into the sea. Water will also be taken to the Bang Pakong River in the eastern side using three drainage facilities placed along Waterway No. 13. In Pathum Thani Province on the upstream side, open the gates of Waterway No. 6, the Rangsit Canal, and Raphiphat Canal to direct the water to the eastern area of Bangkok. The major flood that struck in 2011 was caused primarily by the water stored at the northern end of Bangkok. Therefore, the water should have been guided in the southeastern direction to the greatest extent possible (*Matichon*, Sep 11, 2012). This idea, however, overlooked the topographical features that largely

prevented the water from flowing into the eastern area of Bangkok, rather than intentionally blocking such a pathway.

4.1.3 Concerns

Floodwalls were built around the industrial estates. Those in Bangkok have been raised or reinforced. It is natural that residents in other areas aim to build similar ring levees. *The Nation* newspaper reported that situation in July 2012. After the flood in 2011, the residents of Nakhon Sawan City thought that they needed high floodwalls like those of Bangkok to protect themselves. The highest water level (above sea level) in the city had reached 3.13 meters in 1995, 3.33 meters in 2006, and 3.88 meters in 2011. The city allocated a budget of 1.1 billion baht to build a permanent floodwall with total length of 20 kilometers along the Chao Phraya River to protect the city center of 27.7 square kilometers. In Chainat Province, too, a levee with a total length of 23.8 kilometers running southward from the Chao Phraya Dam along Phahonyothin Road was constructed. The highest point of the levee reached 3 meters. A 12-kilometer floodwall and levee were built in the flood risk area along the Chao Phraya River in Ang Thong Province. “Because the land of Ang Thong is low, the entire province would be engulfed by the large amount of water from the Chao Phraya River and Noi River if there were no floodwalls in preparation for flooding,” said the Director of the Provincial Office of DDPM. In Ayutthaya Province, the plan was to guide and contain water in the designated retarding basins in the three districts of Phak Hai, Bang Ban, and Sena by raising seven roads to 5.2 meters above sea level (*The Nation*, July 23, 2012).

Many experts warn similarly that such competition of reinforcing walls, banks and

levees, and roads would increase water levels in cases of flooding, faster currents, and collapse of embankments lacking reinforcement. A researcher predicts that reinforcing the embankments of canals running east–west to protect Bangkok, Pathum Thani Province, and Nonthaburi Province would result in a water flood water level increased by 60 centimeters in some areas in neighboring provinces such as Suphan Buri, Ayutthaya, and Nakhon Nayok (*Bangkok Post*, Jun 19 and 22, 2012).

Communities in downstream areas must focus not only on building ring levees, which is the ultimate form of forcing the water onto other communities, but development of floodways having adequate flow capacity.

4.2 Pak Kret Model

Inadequate preparations for flooding can actually cause flooding, which triggers a struggle fight to force the floodwaters onto others, leading to collision with central and local governments in seeking subsidies and compensation after waters recede, which results in competition for details related to flood control measures and receiving orders. This occurred in the area south of Ayutthaya Province after October 2011. There was an exceptional case of Pak Kret Municipality in Nonthaburi Province, which escaped from the flood despite being adjacent to Bangkok. The 36 square kilometer city included a population of 179,000 in 2012, 80,000 households, 63 villages, and five subdistricts. It is bordered on the west side by the Chao Phraya River for 10 kilometers and on the east side by the Khlong Prapha Canal for 16 kilometers. As geographical features, it is a low and flat land of 1.5 meters to 2 meters above sea level. The flood damage suffered by

Pak Kret City in 2011 was extremely slight, considering that all the right bank of the Chao Phraya River on the west side, Pathum Thani Province on the north side, and Don Mueang District in Bangkok on the east side were inundated.

The key to the success of Pak Kret Municipality was likely the ability of the mayor and cooperative efforts among the residents. The mayor became a subdistrict chief (*kamnan*) at the age of 25 and is currently serving his fifth term as a mayor. He protected his constituents by virtue of his rich experience, extensive personal connections, and decisiveness. First, he emphasized flood control measures after a flood in 1995 when nearly 30% of the city had been submerged. He raised the roads in the city by approximately 50 centimeters to use them as embankments and developed a drainage system. In all, 17 drainage facilities, 60 lifting pumps, five water pumps, and other devices were installed to strengthen the flood control capacity of waterways. Additionally, the city successfully convinced the central government to construct a 1-meter- to 1.5-meter-high embankment along the mainstream of the Chao Phraya River. The mayor devoted the greatest attention to flood control every year. During the flood in 2011, the city dredged waterways, stacked sandbags, and built embankments while paying attention not to block the waterways accidentally and cause flooding. As a contingency for flooding from the mainstream, the locations to build double waterproof banks were determined in advance. The first bank was constructed promptly. During the flood, the mayor hired a security company to conduct 24-hour monitoring in preparation for the collapse of levees and water rising and placed power shovels at important points.

Secondly, his extensive personal connections helped him to solicit support from politicians nationwide. In the average year, earth and sand for flood control would be

brought in from upstream Saraburi and Ayutthaya Provinces. In 2011, however, these provinces were flooded early on, and the materials had to be procured from other regions. Politicians from other municipalities and a member of Parliament elected from Uthai Thani Province provided assistance in the procurement of materials. Some politicians in the northeastern region purchased drinking water from Laos and sent it to Pak Kret City.

The third point is related to the courageous actions of the mayor. In 2011, he learned of the severe flood conditions in the midstream area and established a task force in July. He launched specific measures particularly after downtown Nakhon Sawan had been inundated. With the city's annual budget of 1 billion baht, 150 million baht was allocated from reserve funds to implement flood control measures. He also borrowed soil stored at the Army arsenal, which was, in a strict sense, illegal, in the city to make sandbags and constructed waterproof banks along the Khlong Prapha Canal also outside the city to increase the flood control capacity.

The flood control measures of Pak Kret City are praised as a model largely because of the absence of intense conflicts between the residents of flooded areas and residents of areas that escaped the flood, which commonly occurs in other areas during a flood. Another key was the monks at temples. Together with school teachers, monks took leadership roles in making sandbags, became models, and encouraged residents to participate. Immigrant workers from Myanmar and Cambodia at factories in the city also joined the sandbag-making. Monks were able to urge the residents to make themselves psychologically ready for floods when the water level increased (*Khom Chat Luk*, Nov. 14, 2012). Even in Pak Kret City, approximately 2,000 households suffered flood damage in 2011. The damage occurred in the area along the Chao Phraya River where

the residents had been affected every year in the past. When water flew out of the river and the area began to be submerged, the local government would build a bank and block the spread of the flood, causing the area between the mainstream embankment and this bank to remain flooded for more than one month. Yet unlike the residents on the Bangkok side who attempted to destroy the embankments of the Khlong Prapha Canal, victims in Pak Kret Municipality would not break the banks.

According to a victimized resident, while not all residents can accept the fact of being placed outside the banks, “no one would try to destroy the banks just to make the residents inside the banks suffer the floods the same way like in other regions. Even if their homes were submerged, it was better to be able to obtain food and daily goods at nearby places by boat or through wooden bridges than travelling far by boat or having all residents flooded” (*Prachachat Thurakit*, Nov. 14-16, 2012). Another victimized resident commented, “the flood could not have been prevented. It is meaningless to destroy the banks just to flood the regions that are not flooded. For someone who has never experienced a flood before, however, it is understandable that he thinks he could make some flooded the same way he has been flooded. If you have been flooded many times, on the other hand, you know that breaking down the banks will do no good. The water that came will eventually go away” (*Prachachat Thurakit*, Nov. 14-16, 2012), suggesting that one factor is their familiarity with flooding. Furthermore, the Pak Kret municipal government devoted attention to support for flood victims. The municipal government established evacuation sites and prepared meals, distributed a week’s worth of emergency food every week, and paid a solatium of 2,000 baht per household separately from the solatium provided by the central government.

5. Concluding Remarks

Pak Kret Municipality is probably also praised as a model because of its clear contrast with Bangkok, which was long preoccupied with political strife. Flooding and its aftermath came to be used in political strife when the water mass approached Bangkok in October 2011. Although Sukhothai Province or Ayutthaya Province were submerged, acts such as placing the blame on other communities or fighting over rights and benefits were not evident. Various aspects became political as soon as the capital was involved in flood disputes. This eventuality resulted from several factors.

First, the media coverage, including television and newspapers, is overly concentrated in Bangkok. If a demonstration or gathering is held, for instance, it would not be broadcast if it were held in a rural area, but it would attract media attention if it were held in the Capital. The ability of Bangkok residents to distribute information is much higher and voices spread easily. Secondly, in the elections of executive heads or assembly members of local governments, party nomination is important only in the case of the capital. Conflicts in national politics are aggravated when combined with conflicts in capital politics. Particularly since 2006, support of the anti-Thaksin party has increased in Bangkok, signifying that many Bangkok residents are critical of the national politics supported by the pro-Thaksin party. For people who are critical of the government, the flood is good ammunition even though it is a natural disaster.

Politicization of the flood continued even after 2012. Using the national distress from flooding as a tool to solicit public support does not contribute to prevention of flooding or support for victims. Rather, fruitless verbal warfare might only be repeated.

This will only distress the disaster victims. Politicization of flooding increases as long as the government remains divided between the Phuea Thai Party in charge of the national administration and the Democrat Party in charge of the capital administration, which will exploit any flaws of the other party associated with flood as ammunition to criticize the other. Even if such a government twist is resolved, the party loyalty planted in many Thai people cannot be erased easily. For example, on January 22, 2013, residents on 676 households in four areas of Thanyaburi District in Pathum Thani Province filed a complaint against the Democrat Party that they could not receive compensation of 20,000 baht for victims of completely and partially destroyed houses because of the 2011 floods (*Matichon*, Jan. 22, 2013). The resident representative claimed that the benefit was not provided for the reason that their houses had suffered no structural damage, despite not having inspected the site. Inquiries to the Ministry of the Interior elicited no response at all, which is conceivably the result of hostility against residents who are not UDD members supporting the ruling party. If discriminated against by the Phuea Thai Party, then they have no choice but to support the opposition party (*ASTV Manager Online*, Jan. 22, 2013). This appears to be strange behavior because the party to demand action is normally the local government or the central government. For example, the residents of Ayutthaya Province marched into the provincial hall on December 21, 2012, and to the Office of the Prime Minister on January 15, 2013, demanding the payment of solatium and compensation for flood victims (*ASTV Manager Online*, Dec. 21, 2012; *Daily News*, Jan. 15, 2013). The Thanyaburi residents' directed appeal to the opposition party instead of the government is a rather politically motivated behavior. Such a state of political split in which not only politicians, but even some ordinary civilians politicize

the floods prevents solidarity and unified efforts to fight against flooding as a national crisis and as a common enemy.

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Krungthep Thurakit

Matichom

Prachachat Thurakit

Prachathai

Thai Rat

The Nation