

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Findings on Respondents Personal Data

The subjects of this study represented a diversity of age and educational levels and had a diversity of responses. The subjects were 54.8% male and 45.2% female. With 38.5% aged between 26-45 years old. 38.1% of the respondents had bachelor's degrees. Most of the respondents prayed regularly (73%) and regularly observed the practice of fasting (85.9%). The vast majority of the respondents (96.3%) had followed the news and situation in the southern border provinces 2 to 3 days per week or more. Television was the most popular media that the respondents accessed with nearly eight-in-ten watching every day. Only 32.9% of the respondents were largely satisfied with the impartiality in presenting the news on television, with 23.6% dissatisfied with its impartiality.

5.2 Findings on Respondents Attitudes' Toward the Problems in the Southern Border Provinces

5.2.1 Findings on Causes of the Problems

The majority of the respondents viewed government officials' and authorities' actions, poor governance, and socio-economic disparities as causes of the problems. They noted government acts of prejudice, injustice and discrimination against Muslim Thais as well as corruption and cronyism by the government officials and authorities. The deficiency in understanding the Muslim culture and way of life by the government officials and authorities, poor law enforcement on crime suppression and drug trafficking were factors indicating poor governance. Insincerity to resolve the problems of poverty, and improve education in the region were the causes of socio-economic disparities. Most of the respondents took neutral ground when asked whether the difference in religion,

culture and way of life, and historical background between the majority in the region and the rest of the country; or the desired to be self – governing and autonomous were causes of the problems.

5.2.2 The Level of Importance of Causes of the Problems

The majority of the respondents agreed on seven causes of the problems. Most of them ranked corruption and cronyism as the most important cause, education and lack of educational opportunity came second, and drug trafficking came third.

5.2.3 Findings on Respondents' Attitudes Towards Extremists' Violence

The respondents had strongly unfavorable attitudes towards every act of extremists' violence including burning schools and destroying public property; killing monks, innocent people, and government officials; and bombing public places.

5.2.4 Findings on Respondents' Opinions and Ideas About Solutions

The respondents felt that the Thai government should make more effort, use more effective measures, and stop using force, in order to stop and resolve the problem of violence. Meanwhile, they agreed that the government should try to establish reconciliation and peaceful policies, and encourage and motivate residents in the region to participate in solving the problem. Furthermore, the government should increase its efforts to eradicate drug trafficking; increase the budget to develop the economy and reduce unemployment; set up occupational training courses for students in Pondok (residential religious school); and establish a combined secular and religious school curriculum.

5.2.5 Findings on Respondents' Attitudes Towards the Actions of Thaksin's and Gen. Surayud's Government

It was found that most of the respondents were unsatisfied with the Thaksin government's actions, while they were moderately satisfied with the current government's actions.

5.2.6 Findings on Respondents' Expectation Towards the Situation

The respondents' had varied expectations for the future with approximately three-in-ten believing that the situation would improve. Meanwhile, nearly half of the respondents thought that the situation would continue without resolution and two-in-ten believing that the situation would worsen.

DISCUSSION

When considering the problems in the southern border provinces one can not avoid talking about the causes of the problems. The respondents in this study were in general agreement when asked about the authorities' and government official's actions. The action of injustices, discrimination, prejudice, corruption and cronyism, as well as the authorities and officials action of negligence and deficiency in law enforcement, crime suppression and drug trafficking were seen as causes, which is consistent with the findings of many studies (Bunnag, 2003; Pidech Prangthong, 2003; Smith, 2004; Piya Kidtawon, 2004; Wisith Datkunchon, 2006.). Among these problems, the respondents placed corruption and cronyism as the highest priority of importance.

Education was the second priority in the respondents' view. They believed that the government was not sincere in efforts to improve education in the region. Consistently, Smith (2004), indicated that levels of education in the southern border provinces were the lowest in the country. The government indifference and insincerity to encourage education for the Malay-speaking population was not only exacerbated by an existing language barrier but also extended the gap between the authorities and the residents. According to the study of the

Department of Community Development (1978), those who had less education had more difficulty identifying themselves as Thai. Actually, deficiency to achieve proper Thai education of Malay-speaking population was a part of the root problems that expand misunderstanding between bureaucrats and the local residents in the unrest. To root out the language barrier Chakapan Wongburanawad (1980) and Winai Caruwanpad (1980) suggested the government place a high value on education in order to improve the ability in speaking, reading and writing the Thai language. Similarly, appropriate formal and religious education was recommended by the respondents.

Regarding the need to be self-governing and autonomous, the respondents took neutral ground. Moreover, there was no clear agreement as to whether the differences in historical background, religion, culture and way of life of Muslims in the southern border provinces with the rest of the country were the cause of the problems. This differs from many other researchers who uphold that the root of the problems were issues of Malay/Islamic identity (Wisith Datkunchon, 2006; Ibrahim Syukre, 2005; Bunnag, 2003; Pidech Prangthong, 2003; Smith, 2004; Piya Kidtawon, 2004;.). This difference might be due to the ambiguity in the situations, or unwillingness to give answers due to a sense of compromise that they learned from living in a cohesive multicultural society. One community leader expressed that he could not specify the causes of the problems since he was not there. That made him unable to have complete information to analyze the situation. On the contrary, the findings revealed clear agreement in lack of understanding the Muslim-Malay culture, religion and way of life by the authorities and government officials were the causes of the problem, which is consistent with the study of Piyanart Bunnag (2003) and Pidech Prangthong (2003). In addition local injustice was mentioned by the respondents, which is consistent with previous studies (Smith, 2004; Piya Kidtawon, 2004; Piyanart Bunnag, 2003; and Pidech Prangthong, 2003.).

The findings of this study revealed the respondents' disagreement with all the extremists' actions of violence. However, the respondents not only disagreed with the extremists' actions but most of them also disagreed with the government's actions of violence. Therefore, they were more in favor of the government to use a reconciliation and negotiation approach. The respondents agreed that the government had not made enough efforts in resolving the problems. Furthermore, they expected the government to encourage and motivate the residents in the region to participate in solving the problems, to allocate budget to promote the economics of the region and reduce unemployment by setting up occupational training course for students in Pondok schools (residential religious school), as well as establishing a combined secular and religious school system. Consistently, Piyanart Bunnag (2003) and Pidech Prangthong (2003) recommended the government work harder to understand and place high value on cultural diversity, as well as selecting personnel carefully in order to find appropriate authorities to work in the region. The respondents also agreed that the government should increase law enforcement and pay attention to eradicate drug trafficking.

The Thai government's application in solving the problems in the southern border provinces was improper. The ineffective and inadequate measures in tackling the problems made many academics and those who follow events in the southern border province had deep concern. The heavy-handed responses to the violence not only worsened the situation but also provoked into acts of violence in return and reinforce the militants' claim that the Thai government anti-Muslim. Alongside, there was a perception of grievances with the authorities and government officials' actions of injustice, insensitivity and mishandled governance among Muslim Thais even people who had side with the government all alone. Since the start of the recent unrest on January 4, 2004 has claimed the lives of nearly 1,900 people (Storey, I, 2005). Academics openly criticized all of the previous government's plans and blamed the government for all the losses of lives and properties in the South. According to Chaiwat Satha-anand, a scholar and peace activist at Thammasat University, in dealing with daily violence in the

southern border provinces, state agencies must take into consideration the political aspects since resentment among the Muslim Thais in southern region towards the central government has deep roots that can be traced to the early part of the twentieth century when Siam (as Thailand was then known) annexed the Kingdom of Pattani.

Muslims-Malays in the southern border provinces are the majority whereas considering the whole country they are a minority. The bitter historical relationship between local residents as a minority and government officials and authorities as representatives of the majority underlies the present violence. According to Soroka & Bryjak (1995) understanding the dynamic group relation among majorities and minorities is necessary to understand the latent conceptual, attitudinal and behavioral factors that form these groups. The contents of group member stereotypes are formed continuously via the socialization process through direct and indirect knowledge and experience. Thus, the differences in historical background, culture, way of life, and religion as well as other societal factors have a direct influence on the formation of attitudes and stereotype which has an influence on bilateral relations. As each group considers itself a majority, seeks to view itself as better than other groups. Of course, arising feelings of superiority generate prejudice on the part of a dominant population towards minority through a variety of formal and informal discrimination. The actions of injustice, maladministration of government officials and authorities could be understood through these social perceptions including antagonism between groups. Most of the respondents in this study took neutral ground about the difference in historical background, culture, way of life, and religion of Muslims in the southern border provinces as causes of the problems. In fact, these factors influence formation attitudes and behaviors of both Muslims, and government officials and authorities, in the southern border provinces. Both groups view each other as an opponent and create subtle form of discrimination such as action of injustices, indifference and subjugation measures. When justice disappears, it becomes no wonder to see oppression, corruption, occupation and terrorism reigning. Interestingly, the respondents agreed that lack of understanding the culture and way of life of

Muslims in the southern border provinces is a cause of the problems. Further causes were maladministration by the government officials and authorities, such as action of injustices, and using subjugation measures in dealing with the conflict, which created untrustworthiness and expanded gap between groups.

Past wars, animosity, hostility have a cumulative impact over time on the present nature of inter-group relation. Meanwhile positive stereotypic contents are created via cooperative, help, and friendly relations (Bar-Tal, D., 1997). Therefore, it is necessary for the government to carry out schemes that encouraging Muslims in the southern border provinces to participate and express their desire for development. At the same time the government should promote social justice with respect for social and cultural diversity in order to eliminate mutual distrust and suspicious.

The experiences of the respondent living in a heterogeneous community in which various ethnic groups have freedom in practicing and representing their identity without opposition and resentment shows that different ethnic groups can live together productively. Thus having different identities in a society is not necessarily problematic. This is in agreement with many specialists who have shown that the government should value cultural diversity as a creative drive for national progress and advancement. Consistently, the National Security Policy for the Southern Border Provinces approved by the former Prime Minister, Thaksin, gave importance to the idea of “people in culture”. People who lived cohesively even in a various ethnic groups as a formative energy for a society to provide a base of knowledge for proactive approach in solving problems and utilize indigenous wisdom in joint regional development based on their culture and identity (Office of the National Security Council of Thailand, 1999).

5.3 General Recommendations

The respondents clearly do agree that the actions of the government officials and authorities and their deficiency in understanding the local culture are causes of the problems. What do these findings signify? These signify that the

government actions have a powerful enduring influence on civilians' lives. The general consensus of the respondents is that the government should

1. Select appropriate personnel who have clear understanding about the Malay/Islamic culture and identity to work in the region of unrest.
2. Create an atmosphere of cooperation and encourage people in every sector to participate in finding peaceful solutions to resolve the problems

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

For further research, it is recommended

1. Replication of this survey should be done in other groups in order to understand that whether the different samples have a significant difference or similarity of outcomes.
2. Studies of the ideas from within Muslim Thais communities about the proper way forward to live as Muslims in heterogeneous environment. These studies will lead to have a better understanding about the factors that influence the ideas of Muslim Thais in each community.
3. Studies of the factors that empower different people in heterogeneous cultures to live productively and peacefully.