

controlled cabinet and Senate appointments. Economic instability, however, brought down the Kriangsak government in March 1980. The new prime minister, General Prem Tinsulanonda, commander in chief of the army and minister of defense, came to power by consensus among key politicians. He gave civilians a greater role in government by appointing civilians to his cabinet. A coup attempt in 1981 weakened Prem's government, and there was continual dissension among the civilian members of the government. Despite student and farmer demonstrations, Prem was reappointed as prime minister in April 1983. He survived a coup attempt in September 1985 and elections in July 1986. Prem was succeeded as prime minister following elections in July 1988 by General Chatichai Choonhavan, the leader of a multiparty coalition. The following years saw a series of military-led governments, efforts to reform, coups, new elections, and coalition party politics. Reforms were introduced in the business sector, the government allowed increased foreign investment, and relations with Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam improved. Charges of corruption and abuse of power abounded, however, and Chatichai was removed from power in a bloodless coup in February 1991.

Multiparty Democracy, Since 1992: In March 1992, with a new constitution in hand and new elections held, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, one of the February 1991 coup leaders, became prime minister and leader of a five-party coalition. When those parties withdrew their support, Suchinda resigned in May 1992, and Anand Panyarachun, a civilian who had served as acting prime minister between March 1991 and March 1992, was named prime minister. Anand embarked on new reform measures, but he was replaced after the September 1992 elections by Democratic Party (Phak Prachatipat) leader Chuan Leekpai, the head of a four-party coalition. Chuan's government pushed through constitutional amendments that provided for more wide-ranging democratic practices, enlarged the House of Representatives, reduced the size of the appointed Senate, lowered the voting age from 20 to 18 years of age, guaranteed equality for women, and established an administrative court. In January 1985, the Thai Nation Party (Phak Chat Thai) won the largest number of House seats, and its leader, Banharn Silapa-Archa, headed the new coalition government. In March 1996, Banharn appointed the members of the new Senate; unlike earlier Senates, most members were civilians instead of military officers. The failure of his coalition, however, led to new elections and a new six-party coalition government in November 1996 led by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, head of the Phak Khwam Wang Mai (New Aspiration Party).

Chavalit made key economic portfolio appointments to his cabinet, but he failed to implement the austere fiscal policies needed to revive a weak economy. In mid-1997 a major financial crisis ensued, the baht—Thailand's currency—was devalued, the Central Bank governor resigned, and widespread protests took place. The government announced austerity measures, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervened, but the economy continued to deteriorate. Despite a new constitution promulgated in October 1997, confidence in Chavalit continued to slide, and elections in November returned Chuan Leekpai to the prime ministership as head of a seven-party coalition. This transfer of power without military intervention, from one elected leader to another, represented a major breakthrough in the development of democratic processes in Thailand. The baht continued to devalue, however, and social unrest recurred. By the summer of 1998, the economy had become more stable, although investigations into banking practices continued to uncover mismanagement and irregularities. With assistance from the IMF, Thailand gradually regained macroeconomic stability.

The first-ever elections to the Senate were held in 2002, and, in January 2001, one party—the Phak Thai Rak Thai (Thai Loves Thai Party)—won an absolute majority in the House of Representatives. Because of widespread allegations of illegal election practices, new polling took place in February in some constituencies. The Thai Rak Thai, having merged with another party since the January election, still won the absolute majority of seats, but a coalition government—with the New Aspiration Party and Chat Thai—was established. Police Lieutenant Colonel Thaksin Chinnawat became prime minister. The Thai Rak Thai was further strengthened in 2002 when it absorbed many members of the New Aspiration Party.

Thaksin set out to stabilize several problematic areas. One was to launch a major antidrug campaign. Some 2,275 people were killed in a three-month period ending in April 2003, and the government claimed to have eradicated 90 percent of Thailand's drug problem. In October 2004, the government launched a second antidrug campaign. Another problem confronting the kingdom was terrorist violence, primarily in the south. In 2002 several police officers were killed, bombs were detonated when the minister of interior toured the violence-prone area, and five schools suffered damage from arsonists. The Thai military attributed these actions to a group thought to be an al Qaeda affiliate and arrested suspected members of Jemaah Islamiah (Community of Islam) in June 2003. They confessed to plotting attacks on embassies in Bangkok and tourist sites. Further arsons and bombings occurred, and attacks on police and army bases in 2004 heightened the terrorist threat. In 2004 alone, more than 500 people died as a result of insurgent and terrorist violence in the south. This loss of life was exacerbated when a massive tsunami hit the Andaman coast on December 26, 2004, killing more than 5,300 Thai and foreigners and leaving another 2,900 reported missing.

In February 2005, the Thai Rak Thai won a 75 percent majority in the House of Representatives elections, and, for the first time, a single-party government was formed. Thaksin continued as prime minister.

GEOGRAPHY

Location: Thailand is located in the center of peninsular Southeast Asia. Burma is to the west, Laos to the north and east, Cambodia to the southeast, and Malaysia to the south. The south coast of Thailand faces the Gulf of Thailand, while the Isthmus of Kra is bordered on the west by the Andaman Sea (part of the Indian Ocean) and on the east by the Gulf of Thailand. Thailand also has coastal islands in the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. The largest, with provincial status, is Phuket, off the west coast; on the gulf side, the largest islands are Samui and Pangan.

Size: Estimates vary. Official Thai sources report 513,115 square kilometers. U.S. Government sources state that Thailand has a total of 511,770 square kilometers of land area and 2,230 square kilometers of water area for a total of 514,000 square kilometers.



[Click to Enlarge Image](#)

Land Boundaries: The total land boundary is 4,863 kilometers in length, including borders with Burma (1,800 kilometers), Laos (1,754 kilometers), Cambodia (803 kilometers), and Malaysia (506 kilometers). Thailand and Laos agreed that in 2005 they would complete demarcation of their boundary. Thailand has significant differences with Burma over the alignment of their boundary. There are disputed sections of the Thai-Cambodia border where border markers are missing. Land mines, the remnants of former conflicts, are still to be found—sometimes with lethal consequences—along Thailand’s borders with Cambodia and Laos. Although Thailand has no actual border dispute with Malaysia, terrorist and insurgent activities in the frontier area lead to frequent border closures and tight security.

Length of Coastline: The coastline is 3,219 kilometers long: 750 kilometers on the Andaman Sea and 2,469 kilometers on the Gulf of Thailand.

Maritime Claims: Thailand claims a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea, a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone, and a continental shelf to a 200-meter depth—or to the depth of exploitation.

Topography: Topography and drainage define four main regions: north, northeast, central, and south. In the north, the chief topographic features are high mountains along the borders with Burma and Laos and extending down the Isthmus of Kra to the southern border with Malaysia. The central plain, which extends to the Gulf of Thailand, is a lowland area drained by the Chao Phraya and its tributary rivers. The upland Khorat Plateau in the northeast drains into the River Mun. The narrow, tropical Isthmus of Kra runs from mainland Thailand to the border with peninsular Malaysia. It has a low-lying range of hills at the narrowest part, about 600 meters in height. The highest point is Doi Inthanon, in Chiang Mai Province in northwestern Thailand, at 2,565 meters above sea level. The lowest point is along the Gulf of Thailand at zero meters above sea level.

Principal Rivers: The principal river is the Chao Phraya, which, with its tributaries, drains about 33 percent of the national territory and flows south into a delta at Bangkok. The Mun and many other smaller upland rivers are tributaries of the Mekong, which forms the border between Thailand and Laos before flowing into Cambodia and Vietnam and into the South China Sea. Together, the Chao Phraya and Mekong systems sustain Thailand’s agricultural economy and provide waterways for inland navigation.

Climate: A tropical country, Thailand has three distinct seasons. The first is a hot and dry season from February to May, with an average temperature of 34° C and 75 percent relative humidity. This season is followed by a rainy, cooler season brought by the southwest monsoon from June to September, with an average daily temperature of 29° C and 87 percent relative humidity. A cooler, dry season, caused by the northeast monsoon, lasts from November to January, with temperatures ranging from 32° C to less than 20° C and lower relative humidity. The Isthmus of Kra is always hot and humid and has the heaviest rainfall. The lightest rainfall is in the northeast. Temperatures in Bangkok range between 20° C and 35° C.

Natural Resources: Thailand’s major natural resources are fluorite, gypsum, lead, lignite, natural gas, rubber, tantalum, tin, and tungsten. Renewable resources include fish and timber.

Land Use: Roughly 20 percent of Thailand is covered by mountains and hills, the steepness of which generally precludes agriculture. As of 2001, rich arable land accounted for nearly 29.4 percent of the total area. Nearly 6.5 percent was planted to permanent crops. Some 47,490 square kilometers of land were irrigated according to 1998 estimates.

Environmental Factors: The depletion of the water table around Bangkok has led to land subsidence. Despite the annual southwest monsoon, Thailand is subject to drought. Other environmental issues include air pollution from vehicle emissions, water pollution from organic and factory wastes, deforestation, soil erosion, and wildlife population depletion from illegal hunting. Thailand is also vulnerable to devastating tsunamis, such as the one that struck the Andaman Sea coast on December 26, 2004. It killed more than 5,300 people, including foreign visitors, and left another 2,900 missing.

Time Zone: Thailand has one time zone—Bangkok time (Greenwich Mean Time—GMT—plus seven hours).

SOCIETY

Population: Thailand's population was estimated at 65,444,371 in July 2005, making it the nineteenth most populous country in the world. The population growth rate was estimated in 2005 at 0.87 percent. The net migration rate, also based on a 2005 estimate, is 0 percent. In 2003, 68 percent of the population lived in rural areas and 32 percent in urban areas. The largest population, according to 2000 census data, was in the northeast, with 20.7 million inhabitants and a population density of 122.9 persons per square kilometer. The central region, excluding Bangkok, had the next largest population in 2000, with 14 million inhabitants and a density of 137.8 persons per square kilometer. Bangkok itself had a population of 6.3 million inhabitants and a population density of 4,038 persons per square kilometer. The mountainous north had nearly 11.4 million people, with a density of 67 persons per square kilometer, while the south had 8 million people and a density of 113.9 persons per square kilometer.

Demography: According to estimates of Thailand's age structure for 2005, 23.9 percent of inhabitants are less than 15 years of age, 68.6 percent are 15–64 years of age, and 7.5 percent are 65 and older. Estimates made in 2005 indicate a birthrate of 15.7 births per 1,000 population and a death rate of just over 7.0 deaths per 1,000. In 2005 life expectancy was estimated at 73.9 years for women and 69.4 for men, or nearly 71.6 years total. The infant mortality rate was estimated at nearly 20.5 per 1,000 live births in 2005. The total fertility rate for 2005 has been estimated at nearly 1.9 children per woman.

Ethnic Groups: Official government estimates indicate that people of Thai ethnicity make up 80 percent of the population. Another 10 percent are ethnic Chinese, and 3 percent are Malay, leaving 7 percent as uncategorized. Additionally, in 2004 Thailand hosted some 188,400 refugees from Burma, many of them ethnic, non-Thai-speaking Karen who fled their country in the face of fighting between Karen rebels and Burmese troops. An estimated 1 million members of hill tribes, collectively called “highlanders,” live in the northwest. Remnants of 1940s Chinese

Nationalist military forces and their descendants and children of Vietnamese immigrants live in northeastern Thailand.

Languages: Nearly 94 percent of the people speak Tai-Kadai (Daic) languages, with Thai (in various dialects) being predominant and the national and official language. Another 2 percent speak Austro-Asiatic languages, 2 percent speak Austronesian languages, 1 percent speak Tibeto-Burman languages, and 0.2 percent speak Hmong-Mien languages. Standard Thai is based on the dialect spoken in the Chao Phraya Valley. The Thai alphabet, with 44 consonants and 32 vowels, originated during the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng (r. 1279–98) and is an adaptation of Mon and Khmer scripts derived from Indian Devanagari. Some 74 languages are spoken in Thailand, including numerous Thai dialects plus English, which is the secondary language among the well educated and is widely understood, especially in Bangkok and other large urban areas, where it is a major language of business. Ethnic and regional dialects also are spoken, as are various dialects of Chinese.

Religion: The predominant religion is Theravada Buddhism, representing about 95 percent of the practicing population and about 90 percent of all Thai people. Muslims represent 3.8 percent; Christians, 0.5 percent; Hindus, 0.1 percent; and Sikhs, Baha'i Faith, and others, 0.6 percent. Section 73 of the constitution states that the state shall patronize and protect Buddhism and other religions, promote harmony among the followers of all religions, and encourage the application of religious principles "to create virtue and develop the quality of life."

Education and Literacy: The Ministry of Education supervises public and private education. Starting in October 2002, the education system offered 12 years of free basic education to students nationwide: six years of primary education beginning at age six or seven, followed by three years of middle school and three years of high school, ending at age 18. Education has been compulsory through the ninth grade (from age seven to 16) since January 2003. With the addition of two years of pre-primary schooling, the length of education was extended to 14 years in May 2004. In 2004 an estimated 96 percent of students completed grade six, and 48 percent completed grade 12. In 2004 more than 8.8 million students were enrolled in 32,413 primary, middle, and high schools; 631,000 students were enrolled in 612 vocational education institutions. Thailand also has 20 state universities, 12 of which are in Bangkok, plus 26 private universities and colleges and some 120 other institutions of higher education. Some 1.9 million students were enrolled in postsecondary education in 2003–4. About half of all university graduates were women in 2004. The literacy rate in Thailand is 92.6 percent.

Health: Data on health care are out of date, but in 1995 Thailand had 0.2 physicians and 1.9 hospital beds per 1,000 population. In 2001 spending on health care amounted to US\$254 in purchasing power parity (PPP) per person, representing about 3.7 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Of this amount, 57.1 percent came from public sources and 42.9 percent from private sources. Some 85 percent of the population had access to potable water in 2002, and 99 percent had access to sanitation. Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is a serious problem in Thailand. The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) stated in November 2004 that the Thai government had launched a well-funded, politically supported, and pragmatic response to the epidemic. As a result, national adult HIV prevalence has decreased to an estimated 1.5 percent of all persons aged 15 to 49 years (or

about 1.8 percent of the total population). It was also reported that 58,000 adults and children had died from AIDS since the first case was reported in 1984. The government has begun to improve its support to persons with HIV/AIDS and has provided funds to HIV/AIDS support groups. Public programs have begun to alter unsafe behavior, but discrimination against those infected continues.

Welfare: Thailand has social welfare and social insurance systems. Social welfare involves welfare services aimed at the poor, persons with disabilities, children, the elderly, women, minority hill tribes, and other disadvantaged individuals. The social insurance system provides sickness, maternity, disability, death, dependent child, old age, and unemployment benefits. There also is a social security system for private-sector employees and medical security and pension systems for public-service employees, employees of national enterprises, and military personnel.

ECONOMY

Overview: Thailand's developing free-enterprise economy has recovered from the Asian financial crisis triggered by speculation against the Thai baht in 1997–98. By 2002, Thailand's standard of living had returned to the level prevailing before the financial crisis. The recovery reflected the benefit of reform measures tied to assistance by the International Monetary Fund, direct investment from Japan, the United States, Singapore, and other nations, and surging exports. During 2001–4 the economy grew at a moderate rate, but the rate of growth was slower than in the booming 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. A long-term shift from agriculture to manufacturing and services continues, but about 49 percent of the workforce is still employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing, although this sector is responsible for only 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The economy is heavily dependent on exports, such as textiles and computer components, which account for 60 percent of GDP. Between 2002 and mid-2004, the number of poor declined by about 2 million. In percentage terms, the poverty rate declined from 15.6 percent to 12 percent during this period, according to the World Bank.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): In 2003 Thailand's GDP was US\$143 billion, reflecting a growth rate of 6.9 percent over 2002. Per capita GDP was US\$2,190 at prevailing exchange rates, but US\$7,450 using purchasing power parity. In 2003 services constituted 46.4 percent of GDP, followed closely by industry with a 43.5 percent share. Agriculture accounted for the remaining 10 percent.

Government Budget: In fiscal year 2003–4, Thailand's central government budget was US\$26.4 billion. The budget was essentially in balance, with a small surplus of around US\$393 million.

Inflation: Consumer prices increased in 2004 by 2.7 percent, up from 1.8 percent the previous year, partly as a result of global demand for crude oil.

Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: In 2003 agriculture, forestry, and fishing contributed 10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) but employed 49 percent of the workforce. Thailand is

the world's leading exporter of rice and a major exporter of shrimp. Other agricultural products include coconuts, corn, rubber, soybeans, sugarcane, and tapioca. In 1985 Thailand officially designated 25 percent of the nation's land area for protected forest and 15 percent for timber production. Protected forests have been set aside for conservation and recreation, while production forests are available for the forestry industry. Between 1992 and 2001, exports of logs and sawn timber increased from 50,000 cubic meters to 2 million cubic meters per year. The regional avian flu outbreak, which still had not been contained as of mid-2005, led to a contraction of Thailand's agricultural sector during 2004, and the tsunami disaster of December 26, 2004, devastated the west coast fisheries industry.

Mining and Minerals: Thailand's major minerals include fluorite, gypsum, lead, lignite, natural gas, rubber, tantalum, tin, and tungsten. The tin mining industry has declined sharply since 1985, and Thailand has gradually become a net importer of tin. As of 2003, the main mineral export was gypsum. Thailand is the world's second largest exporter of gypsum after Canada, even though government policy limits gypsum exports to prevent price cutting. In 2003 Thailand produced more than 40 types of minerals with an annual value of about US\$740 million. However, more than 80 percent of these minerals were consumed domestically. In September 2003, in order to encourage foreign investment in mining, the government relaxed severe restrictions on mining by foreign companies and reduced mineral royalties payable to the state.

Industry and Manufacturing: In 2003 industry contributed 43.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) but employed only 14 percent of the workforce. This relationship is the opposite of the one applying to agriculture. Industry expanded at an average annual rate of 6 percent during the 1990–2003 period. The most important subsector of industry is manufacturing, which accounted for 34.7 percent of GDP in 2003. Thailand is becoming a center of automobile manufacturing for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) market. In 2004 automobile production reached 930,000 units, more than twice as much as in 2001. Two automakers active in Thailand are Toyota and Ford. The expansion of the automotive industry has been a boon for domestic steel production. Thailand's electronics industry faces competition from Malaysia and Singapore, while its textile industry faces competition from China and Vietnam.

Energy: In 2002 Thailand's total energy consumption was estimated at 3.1 quadrillion British thermal units, representing 0.7 percent of total world energy consumption. Thailand is a net importer of oil and natural gas, but the government is promoting the use of ethanol to reduce imports of petroleum and the gasoline additive methyl tertiary butyl ether. In 2003 daily oil consumption of 851,000 barrels per day exceeded domestic production of 259,000 barrels per day. Thailand's four oil refineries have a combined capacity of 703,100 barrels per day. Thailand's government is considering establishing a regional oil processing and transportation hub, serving the needs of south-central China. In 2002 natural gas consumption of 904 billion cubic feet exceeded domestic production of 685 billion cubic feet. Also in 2002, estimated coal consumption of 28.1 million short tons exceeded coal production of 21.8 million short tons. As of December 2004, proven oil reserves totaled 583 million barrels, and proven natural gas reserves were 13.3 trillion cubic feet. As of December 1999, recoverable coal reserves were 1.4 billion short tons.

In 2003 Thailand generated 118.9 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity. Although electricity reserves were in the safe range in mid-2002, some observers fear that demand may outstrip capacity as soon as 2006. Thailand's state-controlled electric utility and petroleum monopolies are undergoing restructuring.

Services: In 2003 the services sector, which ranges from tourism to banking and finance, contributed 46.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and employed 37 percent of the workforce.

Banking and Finance: Dangerous levels of nonperforming assets at Thai banks helped trigger the attack on the Thai baht by currency speculators that led to the Asian financial crisis in 1997–98. By 2003 nonperforming assets had been cut in half to about 30 percent. Despite a return to profitability, however, Thailand's banks continue to struggle with the legacy of the financial crisis in the form of unrealized losses and inadequate capital. Therefore, the government is considering various reforms, including establishing an integrated financial regulatory agency that would free up the Bank of Thailand to focus on monetary policy. In addition, the Thai government is attempting to strengthen the financial sector through the consolidation of commercial, state-owned, and foreign-owned institutions. Specifically, the government's Financial Sector Master Plan provides tax breaks to financial institutions that engage in mergers and acquisitions.

Tourism: Tourism makes a larger contribution to Thailand's economy (typically about 6 percent of gross domestic product) than that of any other Asian nation. In 2003 some 10 million tourists visited Thailand. However, terrorism in southern Thailand and in Indonesia and natural disasters, most notably the December 2004 tsunami, have taken their toll on tourism. One of the negative side effects of Thailand's tourism industry is a burgeoning sex tourism industry and a related threat from human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

Labor: Thailand's labor force was estimated at 36.4 million as of November 2004. About 49 percent were employed in agriculture, 37 percent in services, and 14 percent in industry. In 2004 women constituted 48 percent of the labor force and held an increasing share of professional jobs. Less than 4 percent of the workforce is unionized, but 11 percent of industrial workers and 50 percent of state enterprise employees are unionized. According to the U.S. Department of State, union workers are inadequately protected. In 2003 Thailand's unemployment rate was 2.2 percent of the labor force.

Foreign Economic Relations: Thailand seeks expanded trade through free-trade agreements and multilateral cooperation within such organizations as the Asian Development Bank, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and World Trade Organization. Under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank, Thailand joined the Greater Mekong Subregion's development program in 1992. Japan and the United States are Thailand's top two trading partners and sources of direct investment. Thailand grants the United States preferential treatment for investment under the Thai-U.S. Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations of 1966. Despite close economic ties between Thailand and the United States, the relationship suffers from disputes over agricultural trade, intellectual property rights, and customs procedures. In 2005 Thailand was negotiating a free-trade agreement with the United States. China is gaining

importance as a trading partner and competitor for foreign direct investment and export markets, particularly in the areas of agriculture, computer hardware, and textiles.

Imports: In 2003 Thailand imported US\$66.9 billion of goods, including capital goods (US\$33.9 billion), raw materials (US\$20.0 billion), and fuel and lubricants (US\$8.5 billion). Thailand's principal import partners were Japan (24.1 percent), the United States (9.5 percent), China (8 percent), Malaysia (6 percent), and Singapore (4.3 percent).

Exports: In 2003 Thailand exported US\$78.1 billion of goods. Most exports related to manufacturing, including machinery and mechanical appliances (US\$10.6 billion), electrical apparatus for circuits (US\$10.6 billion), and computer parts (US\$8 billion). Thailand's principal export partners were the United States (17 percent), Japan (14.2 percent), Singapore (7.3 percent), China (7.1 percent), and Hong Kong (5.4 percent).

Trade Balance: In 2003 Thailand posted a merchandise trade surplus of US\$11.2 billion.

Balance of Payments: In 2003 Thailand had a positive current account balance of US\$8 billion, or 5.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). This surplus represented a significant positive swing from the current account deficit experienced prior to the financial crisis of 1997–98.

External Debt: In 2002 total external debt was US\$59.2 billion, or about 41 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Foreign Investment: In 2003 foreign direct investment was inbound US\$1.9 billion. The largest foreign investors were the United States, Japan, Singapore, and the European Union.

Foreign Aid: On July 31, 2003, Thailand repaid its outstanding obligations under a standby arrangement from the International Monetary Fund designed to help it recover from the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis. Payment was made one year ahead of schedule, reflecting the achievement of macroeconomic and balance-of-payments stability. In 2005 the World Bank was funding eight development projects in Thailand. These projects encompassed the areas of social investment (US\$300 million), education (US\$225 million), land titling (US\$118 million), technical assistance (US\$30 million), and energy (US\$245 million).

Currency and Exchange Rate: Thailand's currency is the baht. As of late September 2005, one U.S. dollar was equivalent to about 41 baht. Foreign exchange reserves, depleted during the financial crisis of 1997, have risen steadily to US\$41 billion in 2003. Currency is issued in 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000 baht notes. Coins are minted in 25 and 50 satang and 1, 5, and 10 baht denominations.

Fiscal Year: October 1 to September 30.

TRANSPORTATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Overview: Where topography allows it, Thailand has an extensive network of roads and railroads. Rapid transit is burgeoning in an otherwise gridlocked Bangkok. Tourism and improved economic development led Bangkok to become a major regional air hub. New technology development has brought some improvements to the nation's telecommunications network.

Roads: Estimates vary on the length of roads in Thailand. According to a U.S. government estimate in 2000, Thailand had 57,403 kilometers of roads, of which 56,542 kilometers were paved and 861 kilometers, unpaved. Other sources indicate a lower total of fewer than 45,000 kilometers. Streets in Bangkok are frequently gridlocked, with an overabundance of motor vehicles flowing into the central city via expressways.

Railroads: Railroads are operated under the auspices of the State Railway of Thailand. In 2003 the system totaled an estimated 4,071 kilometers of narrow-gauge (1,000-meter gauge) track. The system currently has some 270 diesel locomotives and nearly 250 diesel railcars or multiple-unit cars. According to figures provided for 2002, 55.7 million passenger journeys occurred, and the rail system hauled 9.9 million tons of freight. Freight traffic is considered an important part of Thailand's domestic container transport to and from seaport and inland terminals.

Rapid Transit: The Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand operates a full metro service on a 21-kilometer-long, 18-station line that opened in Bangkok in July 2004. The inaugural line will be extended in phases totaling 27 kilometers, and two future lines, totaling 67 kilometers, are planned.

Ports: Thailand's ports in order of size are Bangkok, Laem Chabang, Pattani, Phuket, Sattahip, Si Racha, and Songkhla. The Thai merchant fleet comprises 386 ships of 1,000 gross registered tons or more, including 142 cargo carriers, 89 petroleum tankers, 57 bulk carriers, 30 refrigerated cargo ships, 25 liquefied gas ships, 21 container ships, 12 chemical tankers, 4 passenger/cargo ships, 3 passenger ships, 1 combination ore/oil ship, 1 roll on/roll off ship, and 1 specialized tanker.

Inland and Coastal Waterways: Thailand has some 4,000 kilometers of navigable inland waterways, of which 93 percent are navigable by boats with drafts up to 0.9 meters. Thailand's long coastlines lend themselves to intercoastal trade.

Civil Aviation and Airports: In 2004 Thailand had an estimated 109 airports and three heliports. Sixty-five of the airports had paved runways, including seven of more than 3,047 meters in length. Bangkok International Airport at Don Muang, 24 kilometers north of the capital, is an important regional hub for pass-through flights and as a destination. About 80 airlines provide service to the Bangkok International Airport and carry a reported 25 million passengers and 700,000 tons of cargo a year. Ground was broken for a new Bangkok international airport at Suwannabhumi, 30 kilometers east of Bangkok, in January 2002, with a new projected opening in 2006. When Suwannabhumi opens, Don Muang will be used for domestic flights only. Other major airports are at Chiangmai, Hat Yai, and Pattani. There are two

Thai flag carriers. Thai Airways International, founded in 1960, offers domestic and worldwide coverage with a fleet of 81 passenger and cargo aircraft. Since 1977, Thai Airways has been fully owned by the Thai government. Bangkok Airways is a privately owned company founded in 1968 as an air taxi company; since 1986, it has served primarily as a domestic carrier. It also flies to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and offers charter flights to Burma; it has a fleet of 11 aircraft.

Pipelines: In 2004 Thailand had 3,112 kilometers of gas pipelines and 265 kilometers of refined products pipelines.

Telecommunications: In October 2002, the Thai government formed a new Ministry of Information and Communications to oversee all aspects of telecommunications. The ministry is responsible for liberalizing the provision of telecommunications services under World Trade Organization guidelines by 2006. However, the proposed privatization of the state-owned Telephone Organization of Thailand and Communications Authority of Thailand remains controversial. The ministry also will be responsible for implementing the country's information technology policy, called IT 2010, which is designed to strengthen Thailand's telecommunications infrastructure as a means of promoting overall economic development.

Thailand's telecommunications network suffers from delays and other shortfalls in the provision of telephone services as a result of inadequate investment. The quality and availability of telephone service are much better in Bangkok and other cities than in rural areas. Mobile telephones (26.5 million in 2005) are much more prevalent than landline phones (6.6 million in 2003). As of November 2004, Thailand had almost 7 million Internet users, representing less than 11 percent of the population, and 18 commercial Internet service providers.

The government owns most television and radio stations and plays an important role in determining programming content. The government's Public Relations Department requires that all Thai radio stations carry 30 minutes of official news prepared by Radio Thailand, the national radio network, twice daily. Radio Thailand has seven networks that specialize in such areas as news and information, public affairs, social issues, education, and foreign-language broadcasts. Thailand has five television channels, of which two are run by the central government, two by the army, and one by a private enterprise. Altogether, Thailand has 204 AM radio stations, 334 FM radio stations, 6 shortwave stations, and 5 television broadcast stations. Additionally, there are more than 2,000 community radio stations, some of which are being investigated by the Public Relations Department for violating the requirement that they limit their transmission range to 15 kilometers. Thailand has about 14 million radios and 15 million television sets.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Government Overview: Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with a democratically elected bicameral legislature. After years of military-controlled governments, Thailand has become a multiparty political system, albeit one often dependent on the formation of coalitions of numerous parties in order to form a government. The current administration is the first ever single-party, democratically elected government in Thailand's history. King Bhumibol, who has reigned since 1946, exerts a strong informal influence in politics but has never used his

constitutional power to veto legislation or dissolve the legislature. The current constitution, the sixteenth since 1932, was approved by the National Assembly on September 27, 1997, and signed by the king and enacted on October 11, 1997. It is organized into 12 chapters and 313 sections, with an additional 23 sections covering the transition leading to the implementation of the constitution.

Executive Branch: The constitutional monarch and head of state, since June 9, 1946, is King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX of the Chakri Dynasty). The constitution recognizes the king as a Buddhist but also as “upholder of religions.” The Privy Council is an 18-member constitutional body that advises the king on matters of legislation, government affairs, clemency, awards, and other matters requiring the king’s signature. The Privy Council, whose members are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the king, also recommends the name of a suitable person to hold the position of regent when the king is absent from Thailand or unable to perform his duties. Executive power is conducted through the Council of Ministers—the cabinet—which is led by the head of government, Prime Minister Police Lieutenant Colonel Thaksin Chinnawat (since February 9, 2001). Thaksin is assisted by one military deputy prime minister and five civilian deputy prime ministers. In 2005 there were 19 cabinet-level ministries and one minister attached to the Prime Minister’s Office.

Legislative Branch: Thailand has a bicameral legislature called the National Assembly (Rathasapha), which consists of two chambers. The Senate (Wuthisapha) has 200 members who are popularly elected from single-seat constituencies on a nonpartisan basis for six-year terms; the number of Senate seats is determined proportionally by province. The House of Representatives (Sapha Phuthaen Ratsadon) has 438 members elected by popular vote for four-year terms. In the House, 100 seats are based on proportional representation by province and 400 on multiseat constituencies. As of 2005, all 100 proportional seats and 338 of the multiseat constituencies had been filled. The president of the House serves concurrently as president of the National Assembly, and the president of the Senate serves as vice president of the National Assembly. In certain instances, such as the appointment of a regent, declarations by a regent, amendment of the Palace Law on Succession, approval of succession to the throne, reconsideration of bills or organic law bills, constitutional amendments, a declaration of war, or approval of treaties, joint sessions of the National Assembly are held. The most recent Senate elections were held between March and July 2000; the next are scheduled for March 2006. The most recent House elections were held on February 6, 2005, and will next be held in February 2009.

Judicial Branch: Thailand has a three-level court system collectively known as the Courts of Justice. At the top is the Supreme Court of Justice. Below it are the Court of Appeal and, at the third level, the Courts of First Instance. The independent Constitutional Court interprets the constitution. The National Assembly can refer executive decrees to the Constitutional Court for review. Supreme Court of Justice and Constitutional Court justices are subject to Senate approval. Other judges are members of the career civil service and are not subject to parliamentary review. Separate administrative courts adjudicate disputes involving state agencies, state enterprises, and local government organizations, or between state officials and private individuals, and there are administrative appellate and supreme administrative courts at higher levels. A separate Military Court deals with military personnel and persons arrested

during periods of martial law. Islamic sharia courts hear civil cases involving members of the Muslim minority.

Administrative Divisions: Thailand has 76 provinces (*changwat*), including Bangkok Municipality. The provinces are divided into 795 districts (*amphoe*), 81 subdistricts (*king amphoe*), 7,255 rural administrative subdistricts (*tambon*), and 69,866 villages (*muban*).

Provincial and Local Government: Local government is based on the principles of decentralization and self-government when certain legal conditions are met. The constitution allows for elected local assemblies and elected or appointed local administrative committees for four-year terms. Central government officials may not serve as local officials. Bangkok is a provincial-level entity with an elected governor and the legislative Metropolitan Administration Council. Supervision of provincial and local government takes place through the Department of Local Administration of the Ministry of Interior.

Judicial and Legal System: The Thai legal system is based on an amalgam of traditional and modern laws and customs, including Islamic law, where applicable. Most of the modern legal system is based on criminal, civil, and commercial codes adopted from the British and other European legal systems, along with borrowings from India, China, Japan, and the United States. Traditional civil rights are protected by the constitution. There is no trial by jury in Thailand. A single judge decides trials for misdemeanors; two or more judges are required for more serious cases. The constitution provides for the presumption of innocence, and criminal detainees are guaranteed access to legal counsel; however, it has been claimed that local police often ignore this procedure and conduct interrogations of suspects without providing access to an attorney. Regulations outlined in the Criminal Code require public prosecutors to rely exclusively on the recommendations of the police when determining whether to bring a case forward for criminal prosecution. Police are required to bring criminal cases to prosecutors for the filing of court charges within 48 hours of arrest. Extensions of up to three days are permitted, and police, with court permission, may hold suspects for up to 82 days for serious offenses while investigations are being conducted.

Electoral System: There are no elections for the heads of state and government. The monarchy is hereditary and based on the Palace Law of Succession enacted in 1924, which allows the king to appoint his heir. If he has failed to do so, the Privy Council nominates an heir for National Assembly consideration. The heir suggested by the Privy Council may be a prince or princess. The prime minister is selected from among the members of the House of Representatives following elections. Officially, the king appoints the prime minister, who is normally the leader of the party that has an outright majority or organizes a majority coalition in the House of Representatives. The Senate also is elected by popular vote for non-party candidates. The election process is viewed as generally free and fair, but the most recent House elections (February 6, 2005) were marred by widespread vote buying and the killing of political canvassers during the campaign. Elections are supervised by an independent government agency, the Election Commission. Voters must be 18 years of age as of January 1 of the year of the election, must be citizens, and, if naturalized, must have been in such status for at least five years. The constitution prohibits Buddhist priests, monks, novices, and clergy from voting.

