

Banks urged to shut at-risk branches

THE NATION

The Bank of Thailand has urged financial institutions to temporarily close their branches in government buildings, especially if state agencies in the area are ordered closed by the government.

In a circular issued yesterday, the central bank said the traffic could get worse until March 23 due to the anti-government rally, and massive crowds could lead to unusual developments in and around Bangkok.

Meanwhile, the Tourism and Sports Ministry has set up a Tourist Assistance Centre and opened Hotline 1672 to serve tourists around the clock.

Fuel stations nationwide are also allowed to suspend services if the situation deteriorates.

The Bank of Thailand has told banks that their headquarters should refuse to deal with individual clients, though money-market operations and the payment system can proceed as usual. Branches located near rally sites can be shut down with the central bank's consent.

Should anything unusual take place, the Bank of Thailand will only maintain money-market services and the payment system, which involves the clearing of cheques and BahtNet operations.

So far, 10 banks and a non-banking institution have asked for permission to close a total of 24 branches.

The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority has made available 50 buses to cover busy routes, a source from the Transport Ministry said yesterday. All drivers have been advised to remain neutral and the protesters have been told to not destroy buses.

BMTA director Opas Phetmune said private bus operators should stop covering routes deemed dangerous, adding that the agency had measures in place to protect passengers' safety. Staff at the United Nations headquarters, where 24 UN agencies are located, were also told to leave an hour early yesterday due to concerns that the red shirts might paralyse Rajdamneon Avenue. They were also instructed to work from



A BANGKOK BANK branch near Bang Na intersection, where red-shirt protesters gathered yesterday morning, closed within 30 minutes of opening due to security concerns.

home on Monday.

The Thai Association of Landscape Architects postponed its International Landscape Expo 2010 to April 1-4 out of concern over the red-shirt rally. The event was originally scheduled for March 18 to 21 at the Crystal Design Centre on Ekamai-Ram Indra Road.

TCC Capital Land has indefinitely delayed the launch of its residen-

tial project, Villa Asoke, which was scheduled for March 19.

However, the Home Product Centre will keep the doors open for its HomePro Expo at Impact Muang Thong Thani.

The organiser remains optimistic that the 10-day event, which kicked off yesterday, will generate Bt650 million.

HomePro managing director Khunawut Thumpomkul said the firm was ready to move sales personnel from the site if the protesters started blocking important places, though he believes the venue is far enough away from the rally sites.

Severe traffic jams in the city are expected. Individuals hoping to go out can call the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre on (02) 565 7007 for traffic updates.

The agency is also offering real-time traffic information through twitter.com/traffy, along with mobile text messages.