

Headline: Bangkok residents in a mood of total siege
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How are ordinary Thais reacting to the military crackdown? Ben Davies reports from Bangkok

"Please tell your country what is happening," begged a middle-class Thai early on Tuesday morning outside Royal Hotel when soldiers began to shoot at protesters on Ratchadamnoen Avenue.

Other locals put their arms round foreign correspondents and handed them used cartridges as evidence of the bloodbath, which the military refused to confirm had taken place.

Elsewhere in the city, middle-class Thais, while getting on with life, expressed shock and fear at the events which have thrown their country, so recently one of the world's most promising economies, back to the days of military repression.

"We are frightened," said Supang, a stallholder in Klongtoey Market, normally one of the most crowded areas in Bangkok in the evenings and nights.

But on Tuesday, Klongtoey Market was more like a ghost town, with stallholders and customers heading home early for fear of a repeat of the morning's violence.

"I feel sick, tired and worried," said a middle manager at Esso company yesterday.

Media censorship has left much of the population unclear as to what exactly is happening. Reports on local radio and television have been heavily biased.

Only the major papers like Thai Rath and Daily News, backed by pro-military figures, have dwelt extensively on the situation, as have English language dailies The Nation and The Bangkok Post.

Yesterday afternoon, traffic was light on many of the roads in, and around, Bangkok, whilst new crowds of protestors gathered outside Ramkamhaeng University, sparking fears of another showdown.

Foreigners are being advised to keep off the streets at night for fear of attacks by roving bands of motorbikers brandishing weapons.

The feared run on banks did not materialise but people did flock to supermarkets to stock up on food. Many supermarkets said they would close at 2 pm, and the government announced that buses would stop running at 8 pm.

"There is a mood of total siege," said one securities broker, whose son was arrested two days ago in the protests. An estimated 1,000 people were arrested on Tuesday alone.

Many people Business Times spoke to yesterday would not give their names for fear of reprisal.