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**UK, FRANCE SHOULD PRESS THAI PM ON RIGHTS, TO END MILITARY RULE: GROUP**

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Reuters (18 June 2018)

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former army chief who ousted an elected government in a 2014 coup, has promised to restore democracy but has pushed back the date for a vote several times, while refusing to tolerate dissent.

British Prime Minister Theresa May and President Emmanuel Macron of France should strongly express their deep concerns about the deteriorating state of human rights, Brad Adams, Asia director of Human Rights Watch, Brad Adams, said in a statement.

They should make clear to General Prayuth that there will be no return to business as usual until Thailand holds free and fair elections, establishes a democratic civilian government, and improves respect for human rights, he said.

A general election is now due in February, the government says.

Government spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd defended Thailand's record, saying authorities were very respectful of rights.

Right now, Thailand respects human rights no less than any other country, Sansern told Reuters.

Thailand's Western allies criticized Prayuth's 2014 coup, which followed a decade of political turmoil that has brought two coups and bloody street protests.

The military banned political gatherings and protests after it took power and has taken tough action against dissent.

The European Union put relations on hold after the coup but in December resumed political contact at all levels.

The EU is Thailand's third-biggest trading partner after China and Japan. Thailand is the EU's third-largest trading partner in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Prayuth will meet May in London on June 20, before he heads to France for a trip that includes a stop at Airbus in the city of Toulouse.

Prayuth and Macron are due to preside over the signing of an agreement between Thai Airways and Airbus to open an aircraft maintenance and repair hub at the civil-military U-Tapao Airport, southeast of Bangkok, Prayuth's office said.

Thailand will also finalize the purchase of a \$215 million observation satellite from Airbus, Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak told Reuters.

The satellite will have multiple uses, the government has said, including for agriculture and national security.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-politics/uk-france-should-press-thai-pm-on-rights-to-end-military-rule-group-idUSKBN1JE0NI>

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