

Thailand to junta: Please change your soundtrack

By Jocelyn Gecker

The Associated Press

BANGKOK — First Thailand's junta seized power, then they commandeered every television channel for round-the-clock broadcasts of dour announcements and patriotic hymns. The public's verdict: DJ, please change the soundtrack.

And after about 24 hours, they did.

As the sun set on Bangkok last month, Thailand's sappy soap operas flickered back on just as suddenly as they'd vanished a day earlier. After a full day of marching music and military ballads of a bygone era, things returned to normal — at least on television.

In this day and age, it's not surprising that the generals who launched Thailand's coup have set up a Facebook page.

But it was a sign of the times that the junta's vintage tunes didn't resonate with the Facebook generation.

"Since you're reforming politics, you might as well reform your music," said one of many postings on the page, which received more than 220,000 likes within a 24-hour period, up exponentially from earlier in the day.

Song requests poured in — for Justin Timberlake, Michael Jackson, the Disney hit "Let It Go," and for foot-tapping Thai folk music.

"Please give us something more uplifting," said another comment on the



page, which bears the junta's self-declared name: National Peace and Order Maintaining Council.

The running commentary offered a lighthearted and lively sideshow to the otherwise dramatic events unfolding in Thailand, where the military declared martial law and then announced two days later it was overthrowing the government.

The country's powerful army chief, Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha, justified the coup as a means of restoring stability and avoiding more violence in a crisis that has left 28

dead and hundreds injured since it escalated seven months ago.

But some on social media joked that the nationalistic hymns could unleash old aggressions.

"Play other songs, will you! Your marching music is making me so patriotic that I want to wield a sword and slash some Burmese!" — a reference to Thailand's historical enemy and neighbor, now known as Myanmar.

The Facebook page was created Tuesday, May 20 to post the military's announcements and edicts. But the

MUSICAL REFORM. A protester, holding a photo of Thai Army Chief Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha and a banner of a tank, shouts slogans during an anti-coup demonstration in Bangkok, Thailand. A spokesman for Thailand's coup leaders said democracy had caused "losses" for the country, as the junta sought to combat growing international condemnation and hundreds of protesters angrily confronted soldiers in central Bangkok. (AP Photo/Wason Wanichakorn)

complaints started streaming in two days later when the martial music replaced all broadcasts on television and radio stations. There was no apparent crackdown on the criticism, despite an order that asked social media sites to suspend services if any messages opposed the coup makers.

Not all the postings were about music.

While schools were ordered closed Friday, May 23, parents posted pleas for the return of children's channels: "Can I have my TV back? At least the cartoon channel for my kid? It won't hurt national stability," said one father.

One woman posted a picture of a smiling shirtless soldier and asked: "Do you know if he has a girlfriend? I like him."

The coup was the 12th since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932.

One comment on the Facebook page suggested that when this coup is over, it would be nice to have a musical souvenir: "When it all comes to an end, don't forget to make a CD."

Associated Press writer Thanyarat Dokson in Bangkok contributed to this report.

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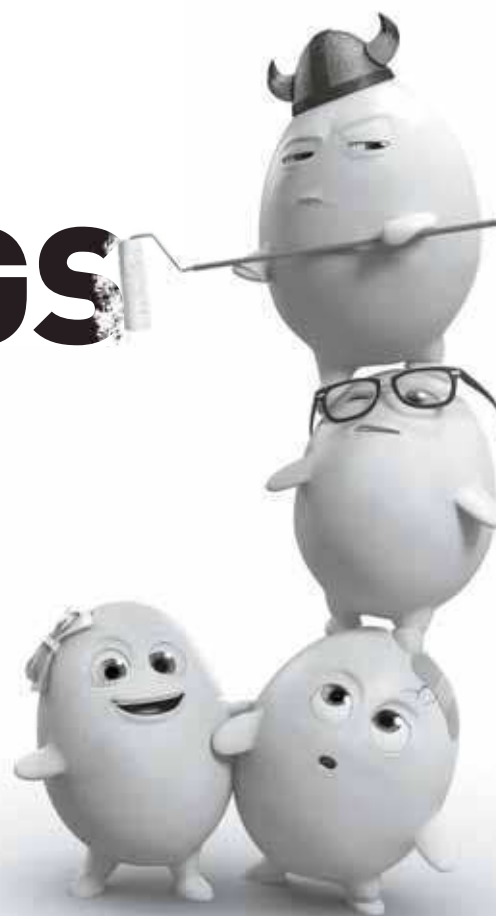
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