

PERSPECTIVE

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Former Thai PM Thaksin at the Centre of Intrigues and Political Rumours: As Mastermind or Just Victim of Fate?

Termsak Chalermphanupap



Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra visited Chiang Mai on 15 March 2024 as he made his first public appearances since being freed early from a jail sentence for graft and abuse of power. (Photo by Lillian SUWANRUMPHA/AFP).

** Termsak Chalermphanupap is Visiting Fellow and Coordinator of the Thailand Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Former two-time Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra is back in Thailand after 17 years of exile overseas.
- He has lately captured a great deal of media and public attention and been at the centre of political intrigues and rumours.
- A recent poll showed him to be the most powerful person in Thai politics – even though he is a convict, whose jail term has just been commuted in a royal clemency from eight years to one.
- It is unclear whether he is actually the mastermind in the Thai political arena, or just a victim of his own complicated fate.
- His youngest daughter Paetongtarn is now leader of Pheu Thai, the main government party. She has no ministerial post in the Srettha Administration; however, she is widely regarded as the prime minister-in-waiting.
- Thaksin still faces two criminal charges in an old *lese-majeste* case. His younger sister, former prime minister Yingluck, is in exile, fleeing since 2017 a jail term of five years for dereliction of duty.
- Thaksin hopes to be absolved of all pending charges, and to enable Yingluck to return home scot-free.
- In return, Thaksin and Pheu Thai will – under some “secret deals” – work with the conservative establishment to keep the reformist Move Forward Party from gaining government power.

INTRODUCTION

Former two-time prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra¹ has undoubtedly captured a great deal of media and public attention in Thailand lately. In a recent survey, the 75-year-old IT media tycoon turned politician was voted the most influential person in Thai politics, eclipsing Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, who came a distant second.²

Thaksin's youngest daughter, Paetongtarn (36), is now leader of Pheu Thai (PT), the main government party. Thaksin has been grooming her to be prime minister, and she is in line to be the fourth in the Shinawatra family to head a Thai government.³

But how soon Paetongtarn, a mother of two with little political experience, will rise to the premiership depends, according to political rumours, on how promptly Thaksin delivers on his "secret deals" with the powers-that-be in the restless conservative establishment.⁴

Ever since he returned from 17 years of exile overseas on 22 August 2023, Thaksin has been at the centre of political intrigues and rumours. What is unclear is whether he is actually the mastermind in the political arena, or just a struggling captive of his own schemes and controversial past.

On his first return, Thaksin looked normal, cheerful and healthy. He paid careful respect to the portrait of King Maha Vajiralongkorn – obviously set up by his family for media consumption. Then he moved swiftly to greet his supporters and several PT bigwigs, including Phumtham Wechayachai, a deputy PT leader and one of the key negotiators for the formation of a new government. Thaksin was then whisked to a Bangkok prison, presumably to start serving eight years of a jail term stemming from past three convictions for corruption and conflict of interest.

That same afternoon, PT's premiership candidate, Srettha, won approval in parliament to be the 30th prime minister of Thailand.⁵ Those who voted for the 61-year-old real estate tycoon included 152 senators who were allies of then Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha. Those senators who supported Deputy Prime Minister General Prawit Wongsuwan, a premiership candidate of Palang Pracharat Party (PPRP), mostly abstained.

The PT has switched sides to team up with the PPRP, Bhumjaithai, and United Thai Nation (three major parties from the previous Prayut Administration), after ditching the Move Forward Party (MFP), which came first in the May 2023 general election. Srettha getting the premiership is widely believed to be part of "secret deals" done between Thaksin and whoever represented the conservative establishment, most probably, in this case, General Prayut.⁶ Thaksin and General Prayut used to be sworn enemies, but both have found common interest in stopping the MFP from gaining government power.

Against all poll surveys and pundit predictions, the MFP had scored a huge surprise victory in the general election. It beat the PT – the hottest frontrunner – and came first with 151 House seats and nearly 14.44 million votes (in the second ballot for party-list House seats). The PT finished second with only 141 House seats and about 10.795 million votes. The MFP alone won more House seats and popularity votes than the PPRP, Bhumjaithai, and United Thai Nation combined.⁷

The spectacular victory of the MFP happened despite Thaksin's active participation behind the scenes from his exile base in Dubai to drum up support for the PT. He even dispatched Paetongtarn to attract young voters. In March 2022, Paetongtarn assumed a high-profile but informal role as the "Head of Pheu Thai Family". But it was too little and too late. Her political debut could not stop the MFP from overtaking the PT in the election.

THAKSIN'S "SECRET DEALS"

Thaksin's return from exile is believed to be part of the "secret deals" widely discussed by news commentators and pundits. Their common assumption is that Thaksin, with the support of the PT, agreed to counteract the rise of the reformist MFP, protect the vested interests of the conservative establishment in general, and defend the monarchy in particular. But what will Thaksin receive in return for his invaluable service?

For starters, Thaksin who had for more than a decade been talking about a homecoming,⁸ would finally be allowed to return to Thailand safely, which he did on 22 August 2023. On the day of his return, PT's premiership candidate, Srettha, won the top government post in parliament, with strong support of senators from General Prayut's camp. This came in exchange for the PT's break-up of their alliance with the MFP. The PT+MFP coalition had in July 2023 failed to win the premiership for MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat – chiefly because of a lack of active support from senators.

Next, Thaksin would be given special consideration for his health issues while in fictitious "detention". Before midnight on his first day in a Bangkok prison, Thaksin complained of severe chest pain and shortness of breath. He was rushed to the Police Hospital, arriving at 00:20 a.m. on 23 August, and sent to a premium suite on the 14th floor of the hospital. The whole process seemed well-planned and promptly executed.

According to the Corrections Department, Thaksin has had a long history of sickness, including long COVID and damage in his lungs, myocardial ischemia (reduced oxygen and blood flows in heart arteries), high blood pressure, and a weakened spine.⁹ Thaksin had to be sent to the Police Hospital – instead of the prison hospital which would have been the case under normal circumstances – because he was suffering from some life-threatening heart conditions, and the prison hospital was not adequately equipped to handle such an emergency.¹⁰

Thaksin soon received the news that he had been waiting for. On 1 September, in response to Thaksin's request for royal clemency, the Royal Gazette published the King's decision to commute Thaksin's jail term, reducing it from eight years to one.¹¹ However, in the published announcement, Thaksin was called a "male convict" (นักโทษเด็ดขาดชาย) who "admits guilt of his offence" (ยอมรับผิดในกรกระทำ), and "repents for his wrongdoings" (มีความสำนึกในความผิด).¹²

Counter-signing the royal command was General Prayut, in his capacity as the caretaker prime minister. On 29 November, General Prayut was appointed a member of the Privy Council. The appointment, in effect, has removed the 70-year-old army strongman from national politics.

Thaksin might have hoped for a full pardon, so that he could return home as soon as his health permitted. Another setback is that his criminal record cannot be erased.¹³ This means he is no longer eligible to hold public offices, certainly not a third premiership term.

Thaksin reportedly underwent several undisclosed treatments, including a surgery to repair torn ligaments in his right shoulder. He was seen in public only once, on 23 October, when he was wheeled out of his room to undergo CT and MRI scans.¹⁴

On 18 February, Thaksin was released under parole, having served the first 180 days of his one-year jail term under “detention” in the hospital. On his ride home, he was seen wearing a neck brace, and a protective elbow sling on his right arm.

However, unlike others released under parole, the Corrections Department said Thaksin did not need to wear any ankle electronic monitor device due to his old age and health conditions. On 19 February, he was seen in a wheelchair at the Office of the Attorney-General, where he acknowledged a criminal case against him. He has been charged with violating Section 112, the so-called *lese-majeste* law, because of a media interview in Seoul in May 2015. He was accused of insulting the previous monarch, King Bhumibol, by implying that the king, who passed away in October 2016, had supported the Army’s coup against Thaksin a decade ago.

Thaksin was also charged with violating the Computer Law of 2017 for causing the creation and circulation of fake news harmful to national security. This particular violation carries a maximum jail term of five years; the violation of the *lese-majeste* law carries a jail term ranging from three to 15 years. Thaksin pledged not guilty to both charges. He was released on bail of 500,000 baht.

This is not the first time Thaksin has faced the charge of violating the *lese-majeste* law. Previously, all such similar charges against him had either been dropped by public prosecutors due to lack of evidence, or he was ruled not guilty in court.

The Chief Attorney-General has scheduled 10 April for announcement of his decision on how to proceed in this case against Thaksin. In late 2015, a different Chief Attorney-General put on record his opinion that the case was prosecutable, pending the arrest of Thaksin. Should the Chief Attorney-General decide to prosecute Thaksin, it will still take quite some time, perhaps years, before a final verdict can be reached. Meanwhile, Thaksin will be handicapped by uncertainties, not knowing how and when the *lese-majeste* case against him will end.

On 20 February, Thaksin received his first VVIP guest at home – former Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen. After a private lunch, Hun Sen returned to Phnom Penh without calling on Prime Minister Srettha.¹⁵ Three days later, it was Srettha’s turn to visit Thaksin. Thaksin has been permitted to travel to his hometown of Chiang Mai, from 14-16 March, for an early Sheng Meng, to pay respect to his deceased parents and ancestors (Hakka Chinese in Moichu, Canton).

BEATEN BUT STILL HOPEFUL

For a short while, the Constitutional Court’s ruling on 24 January to acquit Pita for holding iTV shares¹⁶ raised new hope in the MFP. With his return as an MP, Pita could help the MFP

score more political points as the chief opposition party in the House of Representatives. The MFP, after all, can be a potent counterbalance to the PT.

The short-lived optimism was soon brutally dashed by another Constitutional Court's ruling just one week later. The Constitutional Court, in a unanimous decision by all its nine judges, ruled that the MFP had abused freedom and liberty in order to overthrow the democratic system of government of the constitutional monarchy; this is prohibited under Section 49 of the Constitution. The Constitutional Court ordered the MFP to stop all activities relating to the call to abolish Section 112 of the Criminal Code (the *lese-majeste* law).¹⁷

The Constitutional Court cited as unconstitutional two major incidents: the MFP's use of Section 112 as a campaign issue in the general election of May 2023; and the MFP's proposed bill submitted on 25 March 2021 by Pita and 43 MPs of the MFP to amend Section 112.¹⁸

However, the Constitutional Court's ruling did state that any change to the *lese-majeste* law can only be done through proper legislative means.¹⁹ This has raised a sticky legal question whether the Constitutional Court could find fault with the 44 MPs of the MFP who submitted the controversial bill in 2021, since they were exercising their legitimate legislators' rights.

After the ruling, the MFP removed from its website all references to its policy on Section 112. Yet, the MFP still questions whether the Constitutional Court has the authority to prevent MPs from doing their job in the House. On 6 March, the MFP proposed to the House Speaker the formation of an *ad hoc* House committee to study this issue.²⁰

The MFP now faces a grim prospect of imminent dissolution as a follow-up punishment for the serious wrongdoings. The offences cited in the ruling of the Constitutional Court constituted a violation of Section 92 (Paragraph 1) of the 2017 Political Party Act. On 11 March, the Election Commissioners reached a unanimous decision to request the Constitutional Court to dissolve the MFP.²¹

The Constitutional Court, when it is its turn to act, may ask the MFP to testify to defend itself. In the case of Future Forward Party, the MFP's predecessor, the Constitutional Court took less than two months to announce its final decision on 21 February 2020 to that party, and to ban its executive committee members, including founder and party leader, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, from national politics for ten years.

Facing a similar ban are Pita and other members of the MFP's executive committee from 2020 to September 2023. Pita and four others are party-list MPs.²² They can resign before the dissolution of their party and thus enable the MFP to keep those five House seats by filling them with others on the party's list. After dissolution of a party, its MPs (who are not on the affected executive committee) will have 60 days to join another party and keep their House membership.²³

Also facing a ban are those 44 MPs who sponsored the bill to propose amendments to the *lese-majeste* law in 2021. Apart from Pita, the others in this group included several well-known MFP rising stars, notably: Ms Sirikanya Tansakul, Viroj Lakhana-adisorn, Rangsiman Rome, Natthawudh Buapathum, Ms Benja Saengchan, and Pakornvudh Udompipatsakul.²⁴

In addition, Pita was saddled with a new criminal conviction on 5 February for organising an unlawful “flash mob” within 150 metres of a royal residence (namely Princess Sirindhorn’s) near the MBK Mall. He is appealing the conviction, which includes 4 months of suspended jail term.²⁵ A criminal conviction, once finalised in the Supreme Court, disqualifies the convicted from holding public offices – just like in the case of Thaksin.

Once Pita and his colleagues are knocked out from active national politics, who shall then emerge to form the third generation of reformists to continue working for structural changes in Thailand? Some party insiders hold hope of seeing some among the MFP’s current economic advisors to step forward.²⁶ Ms Sirikanya, leader of the group, should be able to do so, at least temporarily.²⁷

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Obviously, most in the embattled MFP would not give in to despair. They believe the MFP, standing on the shoulder of its dissolved predecessor Future Forward Party, has woken up Thailand with its convincing call for reforms. A significant number of Thai voters have embraced the MFP’s reformist ideas and can-do mentality. More than 14 million of them voted for MFP candidates in the last election, even without knowing many of them personally. Their common goal now is to win more than 250 House seats in the next general election and form a single party government in order to change Thailand for the better.

However, in the next electoral battle, it will be much more difficult for any single party to score a majority victory. Traditional conservative parties are trying to rebrand themselves as “neo-conservative”, “modern conservative” or “liberal democratic”. They still enjoy implicit support from their allies in the bureaucracy, the military, and even the judiciary.

At the same time, the skilful PT will be able to make good use of its government power to gain popular support. It can also count on Thaksin’s political ingenuity and connections. Once again, the PT + Thaksin and the conservative establishment will still share one common interest in the unfinished crucial mission to stop the reformist movement.

Rumours are spreading, once again, that a “new secret deal” is being developed. Thaksin certainly hopes to be absolved of all remaining criminal charges in the pending *lese-majeste* case. More importantly, he also wants Yingluck to be able to return from exile without having to face any charges.

The former first Thai female premier mysteriously fled the country through the Thai-Cambodian border in August 2017. Her bail money of 30 million baht has been confiscated. One month after her disappearance, she was convicted for dereliction of duty (for failing to stop the massive corruption in the paddy pledging scheme of her government). And she was sentenced to five years in jail.

Spending time in a hospital, *a la* Thaksin, after returning from exile and awaiting a royal clemency will be more difficult to arrange for Yingluck. The 56-year-old single mother of one teenage son looks healthy and in high spirits in her seventh year of exile. One practical

alternative for Yingluck is “home detention” in lieu of actual imprisonment.²⁸ All in all, Thaksin will be asking for quite a lot of favours for himself and Yingluck. But what can he give in return?

CONCLUSION

Several past rumours have turned out to be true: It had turned out that Thaksin has not needed to spend time in prison; Srettha – who has no leadership role in the PT – did become the 30th prime minister of Thailand; Paetongtarn did walk in unopposed to lead the PT; and Move Forward Party is facing dissolution, etc.

More exciting developments are unfolding in Thailand. And soon it will be clearer whether Thaksin is indeed the mastermind, or just a victim of his own complicated fate.

ENDNOTES

¹ In the general election on 6 January 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra’s newly-formed Thai Rak Thai Party (Thais Love Thais) came first, winning 248 seats in the 500-member House of Representatives. Thai Rak Thai led a very strong 5-party ruling coalition, which included Chart Thai (41 MPs), New Aspiration (36 MPs), Chartpattana (29 MPs), and Liberal Democratic (14 MPs). That left Democrat Party of ex-prime minister Chuan Leekpai, with only 128 MPs, in the opposition. Thaksin became the 23rd prime minister of Thailand on 9 February 2001. He also became the first elected civilian politician to complete a full four-year term as the head of government. Four years afterwards, in the general election of 6 February 2005, Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai scored another historic political achievement of winning a large majority, taking 377 out of 500 House seats. Its large majority in the House enabled Thai Rak Thai to form a single-party government with Thaksin as the prime minister for the second time. His premiership, however, came to a sudden end in a bloodless coup by the Army on 19 September 2006. Thaksin was in New York, preparing to address the opening session of the UN General Assembly, the day the coup took place.

² See **NIDA Poll** released on 3 March 2024 on who are influential in Thai politics, at https://nidapoll.nida.ac.th/survey_detail?survey_id=686, accessed 4 March 2024. Thaksin came first with 42.90% of votes; followed by PM Srettha with 21.91%; coming third was Pita Limjaroenrat, the ex-leader of Move Forward Party, the chief opposition party; and in fourth place was ex-PM General Prayut Chan-o-cha, who has left national politics and joined the Privy Council. The survey was conducted between 27 and 29 February by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) Poll, Thailand’s foremost pollster.

³ After Thaksin who served as prime minister twice during 2001–2006, his brother-in-law Somchai Wongsawat (married to Thaksin’s younger sister Yaowapa) served from 18 September – 2 December 2008; and the third in the Shinawatra family to serve as prime minister was another younger sister of Thaksin, Yingluck, who became Thailand’s first female prime minister on 5 August 2011. She served until she was disqualified from holding public offices on 7 May 2014. The Constitutional Court ruled that she was guilty of dereliction of duty in transferring the head of the National Security Council, Thawil Pliensri, to an inactive post in the PM’s Office, and appointing Pol Gen Vichien Pojposri, the national police chief, as Thawil’s successor. The personnel moves opened the way for Pol Gen Priewpan Damapong to rise to head the National Police Force. Priewpan is an elder brother of Thaksin’s wife Potjaman.

⁴ Thailand’s conservative establishment includes the armed forces, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the 250 appointed senators (whose 5-year term ends on 10 May 2024), Buddhist religious bodies, big businesses, right-wing civil society organisations, etc. All of them profess to respect and uphold the

inviolable sanctity of the monarchy. These different components of the conservative establishment have found their common enemy in the MFP whose policy initiatives for change threaten their particular vested interests: downsizing the armed forces and ending the annual conscription; decentralising government and electing all provincial governors like in Bangkok; demanding transparency and accountability of the judiciary; abolishing the Senate; liberalising liquor and beer production, and legalising same-sex marriage; abolishing business monopolies, supporting SMEs with easy credit to compete with big businesses, and raising the minimum wage to at least 450 baht a day; supporting pro-democracy and pro-human rights foreign policy; and ending “bamboo diplomacy”.

⁵ Srettha won the premiership with 482 votes: 330 MPs (314 MPs from 11 parties in the ruling coalition, and 16 MPs of Democrat Party in the opposition) and 152 senators voted for him. See details of the vote on **BBC Thailand**, 22 August 2023, at www.bbc.com/thai/articles/cjz17119zqo, accessed 4 March 2024. On 13 July 2023, in the first premiership election in parliament after the May 2023 general election, MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat failed to win the premiership, receiving only 324 votes (at least 375 votes were required to win); only 13 of the 250 appointed senators voted for Pita.

⁶ General Prayut, while he was the army chief, led a bloodless coup on 22 May 2014 to topple the Pheu Thai-led coalition government after six months of anti-government protests in Bangkok by the People’s Democratic Reform Committee, led by Suthep Thugsuban, a former deputy prime minister in the Abhisit Administration, and a former deputy leader of Democrat Party. Yingluck, as mentioned in End Notes 3 above, was already out of office 15 days before the coup. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce Niwatthamrong Bounsongpaisarn was the acting-prime minister. Apart from heading the National Council for Peace and Order set up by coup makers, General Prayut became prime minister on 24 August 2014. After the general election of 2019, he was elected in parliament to serve as prime minister for the second time. The royal proclamation appointing him prime minister came on 9 June 2019. After the advent of Srettha as new prime minister in August 2023, General Prayut was appointed a member of the Privy Council on 29 November 2023. This presumably keeps him out of national politics for good. But he could still return to head a government for another two years, before he reaches the end of the 10-year constitutional limit for holding the premiership.

⁷ Bhumjaithai (BJT) won only 71 House seats and 1.138 million votes; the PRRP, 40 House seats and 0.531 million votes; and United Thai Nation (UTN), 36 House seats, nearly 4.8 million votes. See official results of the general election of 14 May 2023 at the website of the **Office of the Election Commission** at <https://ectreport66.ect.go.th/overview>, accessed 9 March 2024.

⁸ See the author’s article in 2021 on Thaksin’s “dream” of homecoming in **ISEAS Perspective**, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-104>, accessed 10 March 2024.

⁹ See the press release (in Thai) at the **Thai PBS TV**’s website on 23 August 2023, at <https://www.thaipbs.or.th/news/content/330911>, accessed 4 March 2024.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See details on the **Royal Gazette**, 1 September 2023, at <https://ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/documents/140B040N000000000100.pdf>, accessed 4 March 2024.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ “ ‘บิ๊กต้อ’ เผย ‘ทักษิณ’ ไม่เข้าเกณฑ์ล้างมลทินทะเบียนประวัติอาชญากร ” [‘Big Tor’ discloses that ‘Thaksin’ is not eligible for any deletion of his criminal record], **Thai Post**, 16 November 2023. ‘Big Tor’ is the media nickname of National Police Chief Pol Gen Torsak Sukvimol. The Office of Criminal Records is under the National Police Force. See details at <https://www.posttoday.com/general-news/702074> One factor that prevents Thaksin from enjoying the benefit is in his initial combined jail term exceeded one year.

¹⁴ See a photo of Thaksin in his sickbed outside his VIP suite at the Police Hospital in Bangkok in **Manager Online**, 23 October 2023, at <https://mgronline.com/politics/detail/9660000092600>, accessed 4 March 2024.

¹⁵ See the author’s commentary on Fulcrum, “Who is in charge in Thailand?” in **ISEAS Fulcrum**, 5 March 2024, <https://fulcrum.sg/who-is-really-in-charge-in-thailand>, accessed 10 March 2024.

¹⁶ “มติศาลรัฐธรรมนูญ 8 – 1 พิธา ‘ถือหุ้นไอทีวี’ ไม่พ้น สส. เพราะไม่ถือเป็นสื่อ” [Constitutional Court’s ruling, 8 to 1 on Pita’s holding of ‘iTV shares’: not losing his House membership, because (iTV) no longer a media], **BBC Thailand**, 24 January 2024, at <https://www.bbc.com/thai/articles/c72g6d7yer4o#>, accessed 10 March 2024.

¹⁷ See the full text of the Constitutional Court’s ruling of 31 January 2024, which was published in the **Royal Gazette** on 29 February 2024, at www.rachakitcha.soc.go.th/documents/20984.pdf, accessed 10 March 2024. The ruling also stated that attempts to amend the law can only be done through proper legislative means.

¹⁸ The bill, which had never been adopted for further consideration in the House, proposed the following changes, among others:

- Reducing to no more than one year the maximum jail term for insulting or threatening the monarch (the current penalties range from three to 15 years);
- Reducing to no more than six months the maximum jail term for insulting or threatening the queen, the heir apparent, and the regent (the current penalties range from three to 15 years);
- Decriminalisation of well-intentioned positive criticism for the preservation of the constitutional monarchy;
- The Royal Household Bureau shall represent the monarchy in bringing to police attention any alleged violation of the law (at present anyone in the Thai kingdom can alert the police to take action); and
- The offence can be settled outside of court, just like all other cases of defamation of ordinary people.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* See the last page of the ruling.

²⁰ “ก้าวไกล” ยื่นขอตั้ง กมธ. ศึกษาขอบเขตอำนาจของศาล รธน. ” [‘Move Forward’ submits a request to form an *ad hoc* House committee to study the limits of authority of the Constitutional Court], **Isra News Agency**, 6 March 2024, <https://www.isranews.org/article/isranews-short-news/126822-news-377.html> , accessed 10 March 2024. The ruling coalition would most likely not support this move.

²¹ The Constitutional Court has the discretion to ban all members of the MFP’s executive committee from running in elections; this in effect will result in banning them from holding public office. The usual ban is 10 years; but in fact, the Constitutional Court can actually impose a life-long ban, if it deems that to be necessary and appropriate.

²² The five MFP’s party-list MPs to be affected by a party dissolution are: Pita, Chaithawat Tulathon (who was party secretary-general, and now party leader), Abhichart Sirisunthorn, Ms Benja Saengchan, and Suthep U-on. Another party-list MP who will be affected is Padipat Santipada, who in October was expelled from the MFP after he refused to give up the Deputy House Speaker post; he has since joined Fair Party. If Padipat were to stay and keep the Deputy House Speaker post, Chaithawat would not be eligible to become the formal Opposition Leader. So, Padipat had to be expelled. Although he is in a different party now, Padipat will still be banned if and when dissolution of the MFP is finalised, along with all of the Pita-led executive committee members.

²³ On 21 February 2020, the Constitutional Court dissolved Future Forward Party (FFP) for accepting illegal loans of 191.2 million baht from its founder, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit. The Court also banned from national politics for 10 years, 16 members of the FFP executive committee; 11 of them who were MPs lost their House membership. Before its dissolution, the FFP had 76 MPs; 55 of them, including Pita, migrated to Move Forward Party; 9 MPs joined Bhumjaithai Party, and 1 MP joined Chartthaipattana Party. It remains to be seen how many MFP MPs will move to join a successor party of the MFP if and when the MFP is dissolved.

²⁴ See the full list of the 44 MFP MPs in the 31 January ruling of the Constitutional Court.

²⁵ Also convicted in the same case are Thanathorn, Dr Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, and Ms Pannaka Wanich; these three are now in the “Progress Movement” following the dissolution of their Future Forward Party in February 2020.

²⁶ “รู้จัก 7 แกนนำทีมเศรษฐกิจ พรรคก้าวไกล” [Getting to know the seven economic advisors to Move Forward Party], **Money & Banking Online**, 21 May 2023, <https://moneyandbanking.co.th/2023/39786/>, accessed 10 March 2024.

²⁷ Ms Sirikanya (42) was the designated finance minister in the event Pita became the 30th prime minister of Thailand. She was among the 44 MPs who sponsored the controversial bill in 2021 to amend the *lese-majeste* law. She and all the other 43 MPs will have to defend themselves in an upcoming probe by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC). They are being accused of unethical conduct (trying to overthrow the constitutional monarchy). The hearing of testimonies of all the accused will take quite some time, at least one whole year. If the NACC finds enough evidence to press for a formal prosecution, the case will be submitted to the Supreme Court for Holders of Public Offices. Once the prosecution starts its work, all of the accused who are MPs will be suspended from House membership. The maximum penalty for unethical conduct is a life-long ban from national politics.

²⁸ See details of the Corrections Department’s regulations issued on 6 December 2023 at **Thai PBS**, on 11 December 2023, <https://www.thaipbs.or.th/news/content/334784>, accessed 11 March 2024.

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