

# PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

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## An Early Election For Thailand? Will It Matter?

*Termsak Chalermpalanupap\**



Speculation is rife in Thailand that Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha will dissolve the House of Representatives before the end of this year and call an early general election. In this picture, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha speaking at a press conference at the Government House in Bangkok while cabinet ministers look on following a cabinet meeting on October 16, 2020.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Speculation is rife in Thailand that Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha will dissolve the House of Representatives before the end of this year and call an early general election.
- The ongoing “third wave” of COVID-19 infections in the country has aggravated political insecurity and given rise to a vicious blame game inside the Prayut cabinet.
- Bhumjaithai — the second largest party in the ruling coalition, led by Anutin Charnveerakul, who is also Public Health Minister — is bearing the brunt of public anger and heated criticism on social media.
- Bhumjaithai and its two allies in the ruling coalition, the Democrat Party and the Chat Thai Phatthana Party, continue to be at odds with the Phalang Pracharat Party, the leading partner in the ruling coalition, over amendments to Thailand’s 2017 Constitution.
- A new party set up at the end of March is reportedly an “option” for General Prayut, should he decide to lead his own party instead of continuing to rely on the Phalang Pracharat Party.
- General Prayut has nothing to lose if he calls an early general election. He can count on support from most of the appointed senators.

\**Termsak Chalermpalanupap is Visiting Fellow in the Thailand Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute. Previously he was Lead Researcher on ASEAN political and security cooperation at the Institute’s ASEAN Studies Centre.*

## INTRODUCTION

Speculation is now rife in Thailand that Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha will dissolve the House of Representatives before the end of this year and call an early general election.

Having reached the mid-point of their four-year term on 24 March 2021, members of parliament are now gearing up for what they believe will be a tough electoral fight. Major parties are revamping their leadership and updating their platforms, especially the sections on Thailand’s economic recovery in the post-COVID-19 world. Several new parties have sprung up and have started selling big new ideas and policy alternatives to the electorate.

How soon the House dissolution will happen depends on how much longer General Prayut is able to put up with unruly politicians in the ruling coalition. His hand is also being forced by the growing disunity and bickering between the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPP), the leading party in the coalition, and its three major partners, the Bhumjaithai (BJT), Democrat, and Chat Thai Phatthana Parties.

The PPP’s disagreement with its partners during the recent unsuccessful attempt to amend Thailand’s 2017 Constitution led to a serious rift in the coalition government. Worse still, the PPP has formulated its own plan for constitutional amendment without consulting its three main partners. It will try to push those plans through when the parliament reopens on 22 May. The three disgruntled parties will therefore work with some opposition parties to pursue more substantive amendments to the constitution.

The ongoing discord in the ruling coalition will undermine renewed attempts at amending the constitution. Another failure in such attempts will further erode the credibility of General Prayut, since improving the 2017 Constitution was one of the 12 “urgent policy issues” that he announced in his policy statement to the current parliament on 25 July 2019.

General Prayut and his cabinet are also taking a beating for their failure to prevent a “third wave” of COVID-19 infections, which began in early April.<sup>1</sup> The new crisis has given rise to a vicious blame game and intensified discord between General Prayut and the BJT. BJT leader Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health Anutin Charnveerakul has been widely blamed in social media for the current outbreak of the virus. An online petition calling for Anutin’s resignation collected more than 217,000 signatures in five days.<sup>2</sup>

Even more damaging to the BJT was the accusation that the BJT’s secretary-general, Transport Minister Saksiam Chidchob, was a coronavirus “super spreader” because of his alleged visits to two luxurious nightclubs in Bangkok’s Soi Thonglo. Saksiam did contract COVID-19 and was hospitalised in early April, but he denied going to any of the area’s infamous high-end nightclubs. Whatever the case, several club hostesses and 18 policemen in the Thonglo area have tested positive for a new and highly infectious variant of COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

The alarming situation prompted the cabinet to approve on 27 April an emergency transfer of all administrative powers under 31 laws — including those relating to immigration, air transport, cyber security, emergency medical services, and public health — to the prime minister.<sup>4</sup> This measure was intended to empower General Prayut with complete control in mobilising government resources to cope with the “third wave” of the virus.

In addition to coping with that wave, the Prayut administration is also struggling to make efficient use of the 1.9 trillion baht emergency budget for social support and economic recovery. Disbursement for job creation and economic stimulus amounted to only 130 billion baht — or 26 per cent of the 500 billion baht set aside for soft loans to SMEs. Likewise, only 200 billion baht of the 400 billion baht earmarked for job creation have been spent. What the government was able to do with some speed was to hand out quick cash; almost all of the 600 billion baht allocated for cash subsidies have been depleted. Under-utilised emergency funds may soon be moved to pay for the purchase of vaccines, and if possible to be used in a new round of cash handouts for the poor.<sup>5</sup>

Public anger over tightening restrictions, including the closure of businesses and a night curfew in several provinces, is on the rise. Many Thai voters would now welcome an opportunity to vent their frustration in an early general election.

## DISSOLVING THE HOUSE LATER

Most political parties in Thailand do not want to see an early House dissolution. They want, first of all, to pass the bill on a national referendum. The law is needed in order for a referendum to be held on whether a majority of Thai voters wants to amend the 2017 Constitution and, if so, whether a constitutional amendment assembly shall be elected to tackle the thankless task.

Parliamentarians failed to finish the second reading of the bill during the extraordinary parliamentary session held on 7-8 April. The exercise had to be suspended on 8 April when too few MPs and senators showed up to reach the minimum quorum, chiefly because of widespread concern among them about the “third wave” of COVID-19 infections.

Even when the law on the referendum is in place, General Prayut may not be keen to hold an early vote on amending the constitution. A recent public opinion survey had nearly 59 per cent of respondents wanting to amend the Constitution, and nearly 60 per cent wanting to elect a constitutional amendment assembly to do the job.<sup>6</sup> If a national referendum shows that a majority of Thai voters indeed favours amending the constitution by electing a constitutional amendment assembly, then those parties seeking a substantive constitutional amendment will gain momentum in parliament.

First and foremost, those parties want to amend the provision in the 2017 Constitution that gives the 250 appointed senators a role in the selection of the prime minister. To this end, they need to scrap Section 272 in the current charter’s chapter on transitory provisions. Such a drastic change requires the support of a majority of the current total number of 738 parliamentarians — 488 MPs and 250 senators — including support from at least one-third of the senators. There are enough MPs in the House supporting the change to exceed the minimum majority of the combined two houses, which would make a national referendum unnecessary. But securing the support of at least 84 senators appears an insurmountable obstacle. Most senators do not want to give up their power to vote for a prime minister, which Section 272 empowers them to do during their five-year term.

Another highly controversial part of the 2017 Constitution is in Chapter 15, on constitutional amendment, and particularly Section 256. Under this section, any change to rules on amendment under this same section shall require not only the support of a majority of

parliamentarians, including at least one third of the senators, but also endorsement by a majority of Thai voters in a national referendum.

Again, it is difficult to persuade senators to give up their power to block attempts to ease the rules on constitutional amendment. Most senators consider themselves “defenders” of the 2017 Constitution. And that constitution, they believe, was designed to thwart corruption and abuse of power by unscrupulous politicians.

### **CHANGING THE ELECTION SYSTEM**

The PPP’s constitutional amendment plan will be aimed only at picking low-hanging fruit that do not require a national referendum.<sup>7</sup> Neither will the PPP seek to reduce the role of senators. The party wants to maintain good working relations with members of the Senate, and needs their support to approve its modest constitutional amendment proposals.

The primary objective of the PPP is to change the election system – something that does not concern the senators – by reverting to the system in which a voter casts two ballots — one to vote for a candidate, and another for a party. The second-ballot votes collected by a party shall determine the proportion of how many party-list seats in the parliament it will hold. The two-ballot system tends to benefit large and well-known parties capable of mounting energetic nation-wide election campaigns. But it disadvantages small parties with fewer campaign resources.

The table below uses numbers based on the outcome of the 2019 general election, in which every voter cast only one ballot. It assumes that the number of votes collected by all candidates is the same as votes for the same party for party-list seats. If normal proportional allocation of party-list seats were to be used, each of the top two parties would each win more party-list seats than at present. The PPP would win 36 of the 150 seats, instead of the 19 that it holds in the current House; the Phuea Thai Party (PT) would win 33 seats instead of none.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Official Results of the General Election on 24 March 2019**

<b>Party (see below)</b>	<b>Total Votes</b>	<b>Constituency Seats Won</b>	<b>Party- List Seats Allocat- ed</b>	<b>Total of MPs</b>	<b>Party-List Seats <i>Under Proportio- nal Allocation</i></b>	<b>Hypothetical Total of MPs</b>
1	8,441,274	97	19	116	<b>36</b>	133
2	<b>7,881,006</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>169</b>
3	<b>6,330,617</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>58</b>
4	3,959,358	33	20	53	17	50
5	3,734,459	39	12	51	16	55
6	<b>824,284</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
7	783,689	6	4	10	3	9
8	<b>486,273</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
9	<b>481,412</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
10	<b>421,412</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

11	415,585	1	4	5	2	3
12	244,770	1	2	3	1	2
13	214,189	0	3	3	1	1
14	134,816	0	2	2	1	1
15	80,186	0	1	1	1	1
16	73,421	0	1	1	1	1
17	69,431	0	1	1	1	1
18	60,434	0	1	1	1	1
19	60,354	0	1	1	0	0
20	56,633	0	1	1	0	0
21	56,264	0	1	1	0	0
22	48,037	0	1	1	0	0
23	45,420	0	1	1	0	0
24	44,961	0	1	1	0	0
25	39,260	0	1	1	0	0
<b>26</b>	<b>35,099</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

1. *Phalang Pracharat*, 2. *Phuea Thai*, 3. *Future Forward*, 4. *Democrat*, 5. *Bhumjaithai*, 6. *Thai Liberal*, 7. *Chat Thai Phatthana*, 8. *Prachachat*, 9. *New Economics*, 10. *Phuea Chat*, 11. *Action Coalition for Thailand*, 12. *Chat Phatthana*, 13. *Thai Local Power*, 14. *Thai Forest Conservation*, 15. *Thai Teachers for People*, 16. *Thai Civilised*, 17. *People Reform*, 18. *Thai People Justice*, 19. *New Democrat*, 20. *Prachaniyom*, 21. *People Progressive*, 22. *Phonlamueang Thai*, 23. *Phalang Chat Thai*, 24. *Thai Rak Thai*, 25. *New Phalang Dharma*, 26. **Thai People Power**. Those highlighted in bold are parties currently in the opposition, with 246 MPs in the 500-member House. The rest were 19 parties with 254 MPs forming the ruling coalition, led by the *Phalang Pracharat*, which voted on 5 June 2019 for General Prayut Chan-ocha to be the prime minister.

(Source: Office of the Election Commission,  
[www.ect.go.th/ect\\_th/download/article/article\\_20201002121233.pdf](http://www.ect.go.th/ect_th/download/article/article_20201002121233.pdf))

However, the main loser would be the third largest party, the now dissolved Future Forward, which would win only 27 party-list seats instead of 50 — the largest share of such seats won by any party in 2019.

Effects on medium-size parties such as the Democrats and the BJT would be mixed; the former would win 17 party-list seats, instead of 20 in 2019; the latter, 16 instead of 12.

Since the five top parties would have won 129 of the 150 party-list seats under the system of proportional allocation, there would be fewer party-list seats available for small and micro-parties. Consequently, there would be only seven micro-parties in the House, each with one party-list seat, instead of 12 at present.

Eleven of the 12 micro-parties<sup>9</sup> joined the ruling coalition and brought with them precious votes that helped the ruling coalition gain a slim majority in the House after the general election of March 2019. The Thai People Power Party was the only micro-party that joined the PT-led opposition grouping seven parties, which held a total of 246 votes in the 500-member<sup>10</sup> House.

In addition, the PPP also wants to increase the number of constituencies from 350 to 400, and to reduce the number of party-list seats from 150 to 100.<sup>11</sup> The PPP's plan must have set off alarm bells in the micro-parties. Their survival in the next general election is at stake.

On the contrary, the PT must be quite pleased to support the PPP's constitutional amendment plan. The two-ballot system can, along with the move to increase the number of constituencies, help the main opposition party win an even larger number of House seats in the next general election. However, if the 250 senators continue to take part in selecting the prime minister after the next general election, most of them would be unlikely to support any PT nominee for premier.<sup>12</sup> This possibility tends to dim the PT's prospects and could tempt some PT MPs to defect to parties that will be in power after the next general election.

## PARTIES TO REVAMP LEADERSHIP

The PT needs more vibrant leadership if it is to compete with the PPP. Its current leader, Sompong Amornvivat, a veteran MP from Chiang Mai, is seen as rather old-fashioned and uninspiring. So far, no challenger has emerged, however.

Two potential choices, the first- and second-choice PT nominees for the premiership in 2019,<sup>13</sup> have both left the party. Sudarat Keyuraphan left under acrimonious circumstances. Her Bangkok faction did not see eye to eye with a rival faction led by PT heavyweight Pol Capt Chalerm Yoobamrung. Her right-hand man, Group Captain Anudith Nakornthap, was removed from the post of secretary-general last September and kicked upstairs to become one of the relatively inactive deputy party leaders. Anudith was replaced by Prasert Chantararuangthong, a veteran politician from Nakhon Ratchasima who enjoys support from the PT's Northeast faction. Sudarat, who is not an MP,<sup>14</sup> is now supporting a new party called Thai Sang Thai or "Thais build Thailand".

The PT's second-choice nominee for the premiership was Chadchart Sittipunt, the transport minister in the Yingluck administration during August 2011- May 2014. He has left the party to pursue his quest for the Bangkok governorship as an independent candidate. He was named in one recent public opinion survey as the frontrunner for that post.<sup>15</sup> Chadchart has clarified his lack of interest in returning to the PT. And neither will he accept the PT's offer to endorse him in the Bangkok gubernatorial election<sup>16</sup> that is expected to take place in the last quarter of 2021.

Also in dire need of a leadership revamp is the PPP. Its secretary-general, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Anucha Nakasai, is weak and widely seen as merely a temporary stand-in. The *de facto* incoming secretary-general is Capt Thammanat Prompow, a deputy minister of agriculture whom party leader General Prawit Wongsuwan highly trusts.

Thammanat's only weakness is his troubled past. In the mid-1990s, he was imprisoned in Sydney, Australia, in a drugs-related case. After his return to Thailand in 1997, he was expelled from the Thai Army, but somehow managed to rejoin the force and even received a promotion to the rank of captain.

On 5 May, the Constitutional Court held that there were no valid legal grounds for disqualifying Thammanat from holding public office.<sup>17</sup> Its ruling asserted that his conviction by an Australian court and resultant imprisonment could not, under Thai law, affect his political

status in Thailand. Thammanat is therefore on his way to imminent promotion in the PPP's hierarchy as well as in the Prayut cabinet.

Thammanat, whose political base is in the northern province of Phayao, has been responsible for looking after the micro-parties in the ruling coalition. Being the deputy party leader for operations, he is heading the PPP's COVID-19 Coordination Centre, set up to mobilise resources to support relief operations in PPP-held constituencies hard-hit by the coronavirus.

Thammanat was also assigned by General Prawit to look after the PPP's 13 MPs elected from constituencies in southern provinces. Thammanat led a remarkably successful campaign for the PPP's candidate Aryasit Srisuwan to wrestle a House seat from the Democrat Party in a by-election in the southern province of Nakhon Si Thammarat, held on 7 March 2021.

The Democrat Party – Thailand's oldest functioning party, established in 1946 – has been in decline since its 2019 election debacle, in which it did not win in any of Bangkok's 30 constituencies. Its southern strongholds were badly breached by newcomers from PPP, BJT and Prachachat, a new party in the opposition.<sup>18</sup>

The selection of Jurin Laksanawisit, a low-profile politician from the southern province of Phang Nga, as party leader in May 2015 created new rifts in the Democrat Party. Korn Chatikavanij, who came third in the party leadership race,<sup>19</sup> left the Democrats in February 2020 to form the Kla Party or "Party of Courage". Another veteran Democrat, Dr Warong Dechgitvigrom, has also left to start an ultra-royalist movement called "Thai Phakdi". His movement was transformed into a political party on 11 March 2021.

## NEW PARTIES, OLD MISSION

Seven new parties were registered in 2020. So far this year, six more have been registered. At the end of March 2021, there were 75 parties in operation, according to the Election Commission.<sup>20</sup>

The newest party to attract a great deal of media attention is Ruam Thai Sang Chat or "Uniting Thais for Nation-Building" Party, registered on 31 March. The party was reportedly intended as an "option" for General Prayut if and when he deems it necessary to have his own party, instead of relying on the PPP.

The prime mover in this party was reportedly Chatchai Promlerd, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Interior.<sup>21</sup> Chatchai has held that post since 1 October 2017 and has gained the trust of Interior Minister General Anupong Paochinda. He is due for retirement at the end of September.

General Prayut has continued to play his cards close to his chest. Of late, however, he has tended to lose his temper more often. During a meeting on 27 April, he sternly warned an unnamed minister to shape up and stop criticising him behind his back. He even threatened to sack the minister and to strip the ministerial post from the minister's party.<sup>22</sup>

General Prayut's outburst indicated that he would no longer tolerate backbiting and other wayward behaviour among politicians in his cabinet. His display of disdain towards some

ministers has further fanned speculation that he will soon dissolve the House and call an early general election.

## CONCLUSION

General Prayut seems determined to accomplish his “life mission”, instead of calling it quits and fading away.

His main concern now is to stop the “third wave” of coronavirus in his own way, and to secure more vaccines — at least 150 million doses — to protect the Thai populace from the COVID-19.<sup>23</sup> Next on his “to do list” is to stimulate economic recovery by making better use of the remaining emergency funds.

Before long, it will be time to present to parliament a draft budget bill for the next fiscal year. The opposition will then mount a general debate in the House to grill the prime minister and members of his cabinet who are deemed vulnerable.

Fortunately, this year will see relatively few new appointments to top military posts. This means fewer headaches for General Prayut, who serves as defence minister as well as prime minister. Last year, the commanders of the Armed Forces, the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy were due for retirement at the end of September 2020 and had to be replaced by new appointees.

General Prayut will have nothing to lose if he dissolves the House and calls an early general election. If he wishes to return to power, he can certainly count on support from a large majority of the 250 senators.

However, if General Prayut really wants to find out how popular he really is, he can choose to lead a new party of his own to contest in the next general election.

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<sup>1</sup> The 27 April 2021 report of the Thai Government’s Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information Center showed 2,179 new infection cases, and 15 deaths – the highest death toll on a single day to date. Thailand’s accumulated number of infection cases reached 59,687, putting it sixth in ASEAN — after Indonesia (1.6 million cases), the Philippines (1.0 million cases), Malaysia (395,718 cases), Myanmar (142,722 cases), and Singapore (61,051 cases). Because of the “third wave”, in the month of April alone there were 28,863 cases of infection and 94 deaths; from early 2020 until the end of March 2021, there had been only 36,290 cases of infection and 109 deaths; data available at the Center’s Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/informationcovid19](https://www.facebook.com/informationcovid19)).

<sup>2</sup> The online petition was undertaken on [change.org](https://change.org) by a group calling itself “หมอไม่ทน” [Doctors won’t take it anymore]. Initially the group aimed at getting 150,000 signatures calling for the resignation of the health minister. By the morning of 29 April, there were more than 217,000 signatures. The group has set a new goal of 300,000 signatures.

<sup>3</sup> “ศาลสั่งคุก 2 เดือน ไม่รอลงอาญา ผู้จัดการ Krystal Club, Emerald Thonglor 13” [Court sentences managers of Krystal Club and Emerald Thonglor 13 to 2 months of imprisonment with immediate effect], *Thai rat*, 11 April 2021 ([www.thairath.co.th/news/local/2067555](https://www.thairath.co.th/news/local/2067555), accessed 27

April 2021). The news report also says that the police would seek a court order to close down the two nightclubs for five years because they lacked proper operating permits, were involved in prostitution, and ignored public health regulations.

<sup>4</sup> “ด่วนที่สุด! ครม. โอนอำนาจให้นายกฯ คุมเบ็ดเสร็จแก้ไขสถานการณ์โควิด” [Most urgent! Cabinet transfers to prime minister powers to tackle COVID situation], *Naew na*, 27 April 2021 ([www.naewna.com/politic/568930](http://www.naewna.com/politic/568930), accessed 27 April 2021).

<sup>5</sup> “1 ปี เงินกู้โควิด พลาดเป้า ‘ศิริกัญญา’ ข้าແ惚ລະເລີຍໂຄກສັງກັດ” [One year of COVID loans, targets missed, “Sirikanya” dissects the lost opportunity to bring about recovery], *Prachachat*, 22 April 2021 ([www.prachachat.net/politics/news-651204](http://www.prachachat.net/politics/news-651204), accessed 29 April 2021). The “Sirikanya” in the news headline is Sirikanya Tansakul, a deputy leader for policy of the opposition Move Forward Party.

<sup>6</sup> See the outcome of the survey by the National Institute for Development Administration (NIDA) Poll conducted between 17-18 March 2021 at [www.nidapoll.nida.ac.th/survey\\_detail?survey\\_id=498](http://www.nidapoll.nida.ac.th/survey_detail?survey_id=498). The outcome included the following results: 58.40 per cent of respondents supported amending the 2017 Constitution; 25.13 per cent did not want to change the constitution; 59.86 per cent wanted an elected constitutional amendment assembly to work on the constitution; 21.86 per cent wanted the House to tackle constitutional amendment directly; and 17.75 per cent wanted a wholly appointed constitutional amendment assembly to undertake the task.

<sup>7</sup> “ມັດມືອ່ານົມ ພຣົມພລັງປະຊາຊົນເລີ້ນຊັງແກ້ຮູ້ຮຽມນຸ່ມ ຮູ້ອ 13 ມາດຮາ ໄນແຕະ ສ.ວ.” [Tying hands of coalition parties, PPP eyes amending 13 sections of the constitution without touching the senators], *Thai rat*, 3 April 2021 ([www.thairath.co.th/news/politic/2062456](http://www.thairath.co.th/news/politic/2062456), accessed 28 April 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Under the existing electoral system, the total of votes collected by a party’s candidates calculated as a percentage of all votes cast for all candidates in a general election shall determine the total number of House seats that a party deserves to have. For example, if a party’s candidates collected altogether some 10 per cent of all votes cast, then the party would deserve to hold 10 per cent of House seats, or 50 seats in the 500-member House. If the party’s candidates won in 51 constituencies and thus would hold 51 House seats, the party would not get any share of the party-list seats. This was what happened to the Phuea Thai Party in 2019. The party’s candidates won in 136 constituencies. But their collective total votes of 7.881 million represented only 22.14 per cent of the total votes cast for all parties. The party therefore deserved to have only about 111 MPs in the House. Since its candidates had already won 136 House seats, the party was not given any party-list seats.

<sup>9</sup> Two of the 11 micro-parties in the ruling coalition have dissolved themselves and their two MPs have joined the PPP: Paiboon Nititawan of the People Reform Party, and Pol Gen Yongyuth Thepchamnong of the Prachaniyom Party. One of the micro-parties, the Thai Civilised Party, has left the ruling coalition, and its party leader Mongkolkit Suksintharanon now operates as an “independent opposition” MP.

<sup>10</sup> The House membership has decreased from 500 to 488 because of the dissolution of the Future Forward Party on 21 February 2020; the 11 MPs who were members of the party’s executive committee lost their House membership. Later, on 28 October 2020, Tanwarin Sukkhapisit of the Move Forward Party lost his House membership in a ruling of the Constitutional Court. These 12 vacant House seats will not be filled. The Move Forward Party is a successor to the dissolved Future Forward Party.

<sup>11</sup> “ມັດມືອ່ານົມ ພຣົມພລັງປະຊາຊົນເລີ້ນຊັງແກ້ຮູ້ຮຽມນຸ່ມ”, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> The Phuea Thai Party did win in 136 of the 350 constituencies in the 2019 general election. Though not receiving any share of the 150 party-list seats, its 136 MPs constituted the largest number from a single party in the House. But it failed to form a majority coalition; its group of seven parties had only 246 MPs in the 500-member House. It was the Phalang Pracharat Party, with 116 MPs — 97 elected from constituencies, and 19 holding party-list seats — that succeeded in forming a 19-party coalition with a slim majority of 254 MPs.

<sup>13</sup> Each party may nominate up to three candidates for the premiership. The third nominee of the Phuea Thai Party was Chaikasem Nitisiri, a former justice minister, who is now the chief strategist of the party.

<sup>14</sup> Sudarat, like many other Phuea Thai senior figures, was on the party-list. But, since the party was not given any share of the party-list seats after the general election on 24 March 2019, she dropped out from the race for the premiership. The Phuea Thai-led opposition coalition nominated Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the Future Forward Party, to vie for the premiership. In the parliamentary voting on 5 June 2019, Thanathorn lost to General Prayut, getting only 244 votes, including none from senators, whereas General Prayut won with 500 votes — 251 from MPs and 249 from senators. On the ruling coalition's side, two abstentions came from House Speaker Chuan Leekpai and the BJT's Siripong Angkasakulkiat. The latter wanted his party's leader Anutin Charnveerakul to be the premier. Following his resignation as leader of the Democrat Party, former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva also resigned his seat in parliament and thus did not vote in balloting for premier. One of the 250 senators, Senate President Pornpetch Wichitcholchai, abstained. On the opposition side, one Future Forward MP, Ms Jumpita Chankajorn from Nakhon Pathom, was absent because of illness, and Thanathorn could not vote because his House membership was suspended, pending an investigation.

<sup>15</sup> “**คน กทม. ยังไม่ตัดสินใจเลือกใครเป็นผู้ว่า ‘ชัชชาติ’ – ‘จักรทิพย์’ ติดโภมาแรง**” [Bangkokians remained undecided who shall be the next Bangkok Governor; “Chadchart” and “Chakthip” strong frontrunners]. *Thai Post*, 4 April 2021 ([www.thaipost.net/main/detail/98244](http://www.thaipost.net/main/detail/98244), accessed 27 April 2021). Based on the NIDA Poll conducted between 31 March and 2 April 2021, 32.67 per cent of those polled were undecided; Chadchart came top among known potential candidates with 24.77 per cent, followed in a distant second place by ex-national police chief Pol Gen Chakthip Chaijinda, with 11.93 per cent; in the third place was incumbent Bangkok Governor Pol Gen Asawin Khwanmuang, with 8.66 per cent. See other details of the survey at [www.nidapoll.nida.ac.th/survey\\_detail?survey\\_id=500](http://www.nidapoll.nida.ac.th/survey_detail?survey_id=500) (accessed 27 April 2021).

<sup>16</sup> “**ท้าที เพื่อไทย ต่อ ชัชชาติ สิทธิพันธุ์ อบอุ่น นุ่มนวล**” [Phuea Thai’s stance towards Chadchart Sittipunt: warm and soft], *Khaosod Online*, 31 March 2021 ([www.khaosod.co.th/politics/analysis-today-politics/news\\_6239855](http://www.khaosod.co.th/politics/analysis-today-politics/news_6239855), accessed 27 April 2021).

<sup>17</sup> “**ธรรมนัส’ โลง มติศาลาธรมนูญ 9:0 ชี้ไม่สืบสุดสามาชิกภาพ ส.ส. - รมต. เหตุด้วยโภษคำพากษาต่างประเทศ ไม่ใช่ศาลไทย**” [Thammanat is relieved, Constitutional Court votes 9:0 in favour of his membership of the House and ministerial status, because his conviction overseas was not done by a Thai court], *Matichon Online*, 6 May 2021 ([www.matichon.co.th/politic/news\\_2708763](http://www.matichon.co.th/politic/news_2708763), accessed 11 May 2021).

<sup>18</sup> In the 3 July 2011 general election, in which there were 375 constituencies and 125 party-list seats at stake, the Democrat Party won the second-highest total of party votes from second ballots, with about 11.435 million votes. This compared to the Phuea Thai Party’s 15.752 million. The Democrat Party’s candidates won in 115 constituencies, and the party received 44 party-list seats to make a total of 159 MPs in the 500-member House. The Phuea Thai Party’s candidates won in 204 constituencies and received 61 party-list seats to make a total of 265 MPs. The Phuea Thai Party could quickly lead in forming a ruling coalition and chose Ms Yingluck Shinawatra to be the first female and, at the age of only 44, the youngest prime minister of Thailand. The Democrats won 50 of the 53 constituency seats in the 14 southern provinces, and 23 of Bangkok’s 33 constituencies. In the 24 March 2019 general election, the Democrat Party’s candidates failed to win in any of Bangkok’s 30 constituencies, and its candidates won only 22 of the 50 constituencies in the South.

<sup>19</sup> “**‘จรินทร์’ ชนะขาด! คว้าเก้าอี้หัวหน้าพรรคร่วมชาติปีติย์คนที่ 8**” [Jurin won decisively, becoming eighth leader of Democrat Party], *Matichon Online*, 15 May 2019 ([www.matichon.co.th/politics/news\\_1495648](http://www.matichon.co.th/politics/news_1495648), accessed 28 April 2021). Jurin, who is deputy prime minister and minister of commerce, won with 50.6 per cent of votes; Pirapan Salirathvipak came second with 37.2 per cent; Korn, a former finance minister in the Abhisit administration, came third

with 8.5 per cent; and finishing fourth was former Bangkok governor Apirak Kosayothin, with 3.7 per cent.

<sup>20</sup> See the list of 75 existing political parties as of the end of March 2021 at the Election Commission’s website ([www.ect.go.th/ect\\_th/download/article/article\\_20210420143700.pdf](http://www ect go th/ect_th/download/article/article_20210420143700 pdf)).

<sup>21</sup> “สภากาแฟเสียงแตก ‘ปลัดจีง’ จะออกก่อนเกษยณไปด้วยพรรคให้ลุง

หรือจะรอเกษยณก่อนกันแน่” [Observers differ on whether “Permanent Secretary Ching” will quit before retirement to set up a political party for the uncle ... or wait until after retirement], *Manager Online*, 25 March 2021 ([www.mgronline.com/politics/detail/964000028456](http://www mgronline com/politics/detail/964000028456), accessed 28 April 2021). The nickname of Interior Permanent Secretary Chatchai Promlerd is “Ching”. And the “uncle” in the headline is understood to be Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha, whose nickname is “Uncle Tu”.

<sup>22</sup> “รับไม่ได้นินทาลับหลัง! ‘บีกตุ’ เดือดกลางวง ครม. ถ้าได้ยินอีก ‘เฉดหัว ริบโคลาต้า’ ”, [Unacceptable, criticising him behind his back! ‘Big Tu’ lost his cool in cabinet, threatening to sack the gossiping minister and stripping the ministerial post from the minister’s party if such criticism is heard again], *Naew na*, 27 April 2021 ([www.naewna.com/politic/569035](http://www naewna com/politic/569035), accessed 28 April 2021).

<sup>23</sup> General Prayut announced his three-point plan to tackle the “third wave” on his Facebook page on 8 May; the plan included securing 150 million doses of vaccines, instead of the previous target of 100 million doses, as soon as possible.

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