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Uncertainty Grows as Anxiety Intensifies among Thailand's Political Parties

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Thammanat Prompao, secretary-general of the Phalang Pracharat Party, was expelled from the ruling Phalang Pracharath Party on 19 January 2022. Photo: Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/KhaosodEnglish/photos/a.848518215167112/5134851966533694/>. Khaosod English.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Political uncertainty in Thailand has intensified with the recent unexplained “expulsion” of 21 MPs from the Phalang Pracharat Party, the largest party in the ruling coalition. Those expelled included Captain Thammanat Prompao, the party’s secretary-general.
- Thammanat and 17 MPs in his faction will join the Thai Economic Party. They claim they will continue to support General Prayut. Three other MPs will likely join another government party, Bhumjaithai.
- A known opponent of Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha, Thammanat has been demanding at least two cabinet posts for his faction of MPs. He is in a position to mobilise the MPs in his faction and to woo other MPs to join him in voting with the opposition to topple the prime minister in a no-confidence vote.
- The prime minister has so far rejected the demand, reiterating that there would neither be a cabinet reshuffle nor a dissolution of the House and general election any time soon. How long the prime minister can resist Thammanat’s demand for cabinet posts is uncertain, especially with another no-confidence debate looming in June.
- The prime minister is now facing difficult choices: Giving in to Thammanat’s demand, resigning, or dissolving the House before its new session which starts on 22 May, and calling an early general election.

INTRODUCTION

On top of their internal problems, Thai political parties have entered the new year of 2022 with one old uncertainty: When will the next general election be held?

Thai politics grew even more complicated following the sudden and mysterious “expulsion” on 19 January of 21 MPs from the Phalang Pracharat Party (PPP), the largest in the 18-party ruling coalition. Those expelled included Captain Thammanat Prompao, who was secretary-general of the PPP.¹

Thammanat is demanding at least two cabinet posts for his party faction, but has faced strong objection from Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha.

The prime minister has stated that he will neither reshuffle the cabinet nor dissolve the House of Representatives and then call an early general election any time soon.² He has further noted that amendments to the political party law and the election law have not yet been completed. These amendments are necessary to put into effect recent changes to the constitution concerning electoral arrangements.³

The prime minister has maintained that he intends to complete his four-year term, which ends in March 2023. And this year, he has one new incentive to stay on in office; Thailand is in the chair of APEC. General Prayut would love to host the annual meeting of APEC leaders – which includes U.S. President Joe Biden, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Russian President Vladimir Putin – in Thailand towards the end of 2022.⁴

General Prayut’s political fortunes recently brightened with his successful official visit to Saudi Arabia on 25-26 January at the invitation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The visit marked a new beginning in Thai-Saudi relations after more than three decades of “apathy” between the two countries following a Thai janitor’s theft of jewellery from a palace in Saudi Arabia in 1989.⁵

Such a significant diplomatic breakthrough⁶ has boosted General Prayut’s self-confidence, making him more determined to weather the current political storm.

However, most Thai politicians suspect that, if he wishes to remain in power beyond March 2023, General Prayut will dissolve the House of Representatives and call an early general election when he sees the most advantage for parties supporting his return to the premiership.

So far, General Prayut has been keeping his cards close to his chest – much to the continual annoyance of parties in the opposition.

THE NEW THAMMANAT FACTOR

Assuming that the Election Commission approves their questionable “expulsion” from the PPP,⁷ Thammanat and 17 MPs will join the Thai Economic Party, a party registered on 7

April 2020. Three of the other expelled MPs are likely to join Bhumjaithai, the second largest party in the ruling coalition.⁸

The Thai Economic Party's leadership is awaiting an overhaul. It is widely expected that its new leader will be General Wit Thephassadin, the former chief strategist of the PPP. No surprise here; Wit is also a close friend of PPP leader General Prawit. A real surprise will be how many MPs Thammanat will persuade to leave the PPP and the micro-parties, each of which has a single MP, in the ruling coalition and to join him.⁹

Thammanat once characterized himself as the “main artery” of the ruling coalition.¹⁰ He was in charge of corralling 11 micro-parties, each with one MP, to join the ruling coalition. He thus secured a slim majority of 253 MPs to support the premiership of General Prayut, edging out the PT-led rival coalition which had 246 MPs in the 500-member House.¹¹

Even with only 18 MPs, Thammanat will be in a strong position to continue demanding at least two cabinet posts¹² for his party, considering the fact that the Chatthai Pattana Party, with only 12 MPs, holds two posts.¹³

In the next parliamentary session, which will start on 22 May, the opposition plans to call for a debate of no-confidence in the prime minister. This debate will be another opportunity for Thammanat to threaten to topple General Prayut from the premiership.

On the other hand, even if he survives the no-confidence vote, General Prayut will continue to face nightmares over the possibility of the defeat of a government bill in the House. A defeat in the House, such as rejection of a government's bill involving a fiscal matter, is deemed serious enough for the prime minister to take responsibility by either resigning or dissolving the House and calling an early general election.

How the prime minister is going to handle this new demand and the threat from Thammanat is anybody's guess.

Meanwhile, Deputy Finance Minister Santi Prompat – an ally of the prime minister – has been appointed the new secretary-general of the PPP.

PHUEA THAI'S DREAM

Phuea Thai (PT), Thailand's largest political party and the opposition leader, is dreaming of a “landslide victory” in Thailand's next general election.¹⁴ It would therefore welcome an early general election. One of its tactics to provoke the prime minister to dissolve the House is to boycott House meetings. On 4 February, the House had to end its meeting prematurely for the sixteenth time in the current parliamentary session when not enough MPs attended to form a quorum.¹⁵

The PT's dream is to take the lead in forming the next government and to pave the way for a return with impunity for its benefactor, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—now

in self-imposed exile to avoid jail after a criminal conviction.¹⁶ Thaksin has claimed to have “a few plans” to help the PT score a “landslide victory”.¹⁷

Thaksin’s frequent talks—mostly on the Clubhouse social media platform—about the PT suggest his continuing active association with the party, which is a successor to two dissolved parties that he founded: Thai Rak Thai (1998 – 2007) and the People’s Power (1998 – 2008). Thaksin’s championing of the PT has thus put this party in hot water, too.

The party’s opponents have lodged two complaints with the Election Commission, asking it to investigate Thaksin’s alleged unlawful dominance over the PT.¹⁸ As a fugitive from justice, Thaksin cannot join or have an active role in any Thai political party. If the Election Commission finds enough evidence to fault the PT, it will submit to the Constitutional Court a case against the PT for a ruling to dissolve the party.

The PT did not field anyone to compete in the two recent by-elections in the southern provinces of Songkhla and Chumphon, and it may not field a candidate for the post of governor of Bangkok in polls due in the months ahead, for fear of undercutting the independent front-runner, Dr Chadchart Sittipunt. Chadchart formerly belonged to the PT, serving as the transport minister in the Yingluck Shinawatra administration (2011-2014).

However, the PT did contest in the by-election on 30 January in Bangkok’s Constituency No. 9, in Lak Si and Chatuchak Districts. Its candidate, Surachart Tiensuwan, beat candidates from Move Forward, the KLa Party, and the PPP.¹⁹ This victory of the PT is a tremendous boost for the chief opposition party, lending credibility to the party’s ongoing campaign of rebranding and revitalising itself to go for a “landslide victory” in the next general election.

GRIM ATMOSPHERE IN THE PPP

The PPP’s situation worsened after its candidates failed to win either of the two by-elections recently held in the South. Prior to these two losses, the PPP had scored successive victories in five other by-elections, including one in March 2021 in Nakhon Si Thammarat’s Constituency No. 3, a southern seat that used to be a stronghold of the Democrat Party.

The PPP’s losses were attributed to the serious missteps of Captain Thammanat, who used the campaign for the seats to try to showcase his leadership prowess.²⁰

When his rivals inside the PPP sought to hold him responsible for the by-election losses, Captain Thammanat countered with demands for a drastic overhaul of the party’s leadership, in order to get rid of his critics. But he obviously went too far without support of his “protector”, party leader General Prawit.

However, many political observers suspect that the “explosion” was staged with the mutual consent of Captain Thammanat and party leader General Prawit.

The situation in the PPP worsened with the loss of its candidate in the recent Bangkok by-election. Coming in fourth in the by-election was Saranras Jenjaka, the wife of ex-MP Sira Jenjaka, who lost his House seat last December after the Constitutional Court ruled that his prior criminal conviction for fraud and resultant imprisonment disqualified him from membership of parliament.

The PPP's failure to defend its House seat in the Bangkok by-election will further erode the reputation of this chief government party. Worse still, the defeat appears to indicate that many Bangkok voters are now fed up with the unending infighting in the PPP.

RETURN TO BANGKOK

The Democrat Party, Thailand's oldest,²¹ suffered a disastrous defeat in the 2019 general election, winning only 53 of the 500 House seats. It failed to win any of the 30 House seats in Bangkok. And it won only 22 of 50 seats in the South, which used to be its political stronghold. In the 2011 general election, in which the Democrat Party was beaten by the PT, the Democrat Party had at least won 159 House seats, including 23 of 33 seats in Bangkok and 50 of 53 seats in the South.

The Democrats' hope now is to re-establish their dominant political presence both in Bangkok and the South in the next general election. The recent victories of Democrats in the two southern by-elections augur well for the party.

Since the Democrat Party did not field anyone in the Bangkok by-election²², its next crucial test will be in the gubernatorial election in the capital, and in the simultaneous polls for members of the Bangkok Metropolitan Council and for district councils. These elections now appear likely to take place in early June.

However, the party's candidate for the post of Bangkok governor, Dr Suchatvee Suwansawat, is not a well-known figure. He is the former rector of the King Monkut's Institute of Technology-Lad Krabang. One recent NIDA Poll shows Suchatvee running second, with only 13.06 per cent of support among the respondents to the survey, far behind the frontrunner Chadchart, who scored 38.80 per cent.²³

The Democrat Party hopes to receive support from former party leader Abhisit in the Bangkok elections.²⁴ It will have better chances in vying for seats on the Bangkok Metropolitan Council and the capital's 30 district councils than in competing for the post of governor.

GOING HIGH WITH MARIJUANA

Bhumjaithai, the second largest government party, has been lying low and quietly enjoying its steady growth. The party initially won only 51 House seats in the 2019 general election. But the number of its House seats has since increased to 62, after it co-opted 11 MPs from two other parties.²⁵

With its stronghold in the lower north-eastern province of Buriram, the Bhumjaithai Party did not contest in the two recent southern by-elections or the one in Bangkok.

The Bhumjaithai Party is a champion of decriminalising marijuana for medicinal use. Its secretary-general, Transport Minister Saksiam Chidchorb believes that growing marijuana can help generate new income for poor households.²⁶ The party has been pushing to remove marijuana from the list of banned drugs, and to allow every household to grow up to six marijuana plants for personal use in Thai traditional medicine. So far, the Prayut Administration has merely permitted growing the cannabis “weed” by authorised research entities for experiments on its medicinal potential.

Party leader Anutin insists that marijuana should not be considered a narcotic, and adjustment of the relevant laws to liberalise the cultivation and personal use of marijuana should be sped up.²⁷ On 26 January, the Bhumjaithai Party submitted to the House Speaker its draft bill on new regulations concerning the use of marijuana and cannabis hemp.

Undoubtedly, if and when the decriminalisation and free cultivation of marijuana are recognised by law, the party stands to gain a great deal of support from voters throughout the kingdom. This is why the party is considered a “sure win” to join while awaiting for the next general election.

COUNTING ON YOUNG VOTERS

Move Forward, the second largest opposition party, fared poorly in the two recent southern by-elections. Its young candidates in Songkhla and Chumphon received much fewer votes than the candidates of the Future Forward, its now dissolved predecessor party, in the 2019 general election.²⁸

Move Forward’s candidate, the actor Karoonpol Tiensuwan, managed to come in second in the Bangkok by-election—a good result for a party that lacks experienced politicians. What remains unclear is whether a majority of those who voted for Karoonpol were from the younger generations.

The party has also been rather slow in finding and announcing its candidate for Bangkok governor. Only on 23 January did Move Forward announce that its spokesman, the party-list MP Wiroj Lakkhanaadisorn, would be that candidate.

The Move Forward Party will also come under immense pressure to find enough viable candidates to contest in all the 400 constituencies nationwide in Thailand’s next general election. In the recent by-election in Chumphon, the party faced criticism when it fielded Worapol Anansak, a 25-year-old environment activist and food deliveryman who had no prior political experience to speak of.

MORE NEW PARTIES

At the end of 2021, the records of the Election Commission showed that there were 84 parties in operation in Thailand.²⁹ Twenty-five of the active parties were set up after the general election on 24 March 2019. These new parties included: Thai Sang Thai, Kla, Thai Phakdi, and Ruamthai Sangchat.

The number of parties with House seats after the next general election is expected to drop drastically. At present, among the 26 parties with MPs, 11 of them have only 1 MP each. These micro-parties face “extinction” when the election rules change to benefit larger parties.

Nevertheless, more new parties are being formed in anticipation of an early general election. The newest party, just unveiled on 19 January, is named “Sang Anakhot Thai” (Building the Thai Future). Its prime movers are two former senior figures in the PPP: former party leader and finance minister Uttama Saowanayon and former party secretary-general and energy minister Sonthirat Sonthijirawong.³⁰

Their “centrist” party hopes to offer its modern economic policy platform as a new option for Thai voters in the next general election.³¹ Both Uttama and Sonthirat formerly worked for Dr Somkid Jatusripitak, the former deputy prime minister for economic affairs.

Without a party of his own, General Prayut depends entirely on the 18 parties in the ruling coalition to protect his premiership in the House, as well as to pass bills. Obviously, his premiership depends chiefly on the continuing goodwill and support of these volatile parties.

PRAYUT’S UPPER HAND?

This year, Thailand is the chair of APEC. General Prayut seems to be looking forward to hosting APEC economic leaders at an annual meeting in Thailand in the last quarter of 2022. This is a rare historic opportunity which few government leaders would want to miss.

Nevertheless, how long General Prayut can hold on is now in doubt, especially if he has actually lost the support of his “Big Brother” General Prawit, leader of the PPP. In addition, the party, which nominated General Prayut for the premiership in the 2019 general election, now seems to be in decline following three recent by-election defeats.

Without a party of his own, General Prayut is “floating” without any firm political foundation to stand on. And he will be vulnerable in the House, where he cannot count on any government party to continue to defend him and his government’s legislative bills indefinitely.

CONCLUSION

In the end, however, merely offering security to voters no longer seems a sufficient reason for General Prayut to continue in power.

In the emerging post-pandemic “new normal” world, Thailand urgently needs to take effective steps toward economic recovery. This is why new parties are zeroing in proposals to foster that recovery, rather than on national security, in their policy platforms. This is one crucial area in which General Prayut is clearly lacking, even though he has been in power since leading the coup of May 2014.

He remains determined to hold on, though, but whether or not he can handle Thammanat’s demand and threat is unclear. This question has intensified the uncertainty in Thai politics, much to the chagrin of political parties, especially those in the opposition.

¹ “‘ไพบูลย์’ แฉลงเหตุขับ ‘ธรรมณัฐ’ ‘ประวิตร’ รับไม่ได้ ข้อเรียกร้องปรับโครงสร้างพรรค” [“Paiboon” clarifies the cause of expulsion of “Thammanat” is because of his demands to restructure the party, which are unacceptable to “Prawit”], *Manager Online*, 20 January 2022 (<https://mgronline.com/politics/detail/965000006298>, accessed 20 January 2022). Paiboon Nititawan is one of the PPP’s deputy leaders, Captain Thammanat was the PPP’s secretary-general, and General Prawit Wongsuwan is the PPP leader and a deputy prime minister. See also “‘ไพบูลย์’ เผยส่งเรื่องขับ 21 สส. ให้ กกต. แล้ว มั่นใจไม่เป็นโมฆะ ชัน ‘สมศักดิ์’ ร่วมประชุม” [“Paiboon” discloses that decision to expel the 21 MPs has been submitted to the EC. He is confident that it will not become invalid, affirms that “Somsak” was in the meeting”, *Thai Post*, 25 January 2022 (<https://www.thaipost.net/politics-news/72204>, accessed 25 January 2022). Deputy PPP party leader Paiboon reported that 17 members of the PPP’s executive committee and 63 PPP MPs attended the meeting on 19 January, and that 63 of them voted in favour of the expulsion. Those who voted for it accounted for more than three-fourths of the attendance, and thus fully met the PPP’s regulation on expulsion. Nakhon Ratchasima MP Somsak Pankasem claimed that he was not in the meeting and requested reconsideration of his expulsion. Deputy PPP leader Paiboon, however, has insisted that MP Somsak was at the meeting, and there will be no reconsideration, because the Election Commission (EC) has already been notified.

² “‘บิ๊กตู’ ลั่น ไม่ปรับครม. – ไม่ยุบสภา มาตามระบอบประชาธิปไตย เพื่อ ส.ว. ไม่ขัดพรรคเสียงข้างมากนี้จนายกฯ” [“Big Tu” insists: no cabinet reshuffle, no dissolving the House of Representatives. He comes in accordance with the democratic process. He believes senators would not object to having parties in the majority in control of the premiership], *Manager Online*, 20 January 2022. (<https://mgronline.com/politics/detail/965000006333>, accessed 20 January 2022). “Big Tu” is General Prayut’s nickname.

³ Last November, the parliament passed two constitutional amendments. One amendment changed the system of voting to the use of separate ballots for constituency MPs and for party-list preferences. The other amendment is to increase the number of constituencies from 350 to 400, and to reduce the number of party-list seats from 150 to 100. A crucial necessary follow-up is to amend the election law to incorporate the two-ballot voting system, particularly as it relates to provisions for calculating the allocation of the party-list seats.

⁴ Thailand chaired APEC for the first time in 2003. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra hosted the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Bangkok in October that year. APEC leaders attending the summit included U.S. President George W. Bush, Chinese President Hu Jintao, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, and Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri. This year, Thailand is chairing APEC for the second time.

⁵ “ย้อนรอยเพชรซาอุดีจาก ‘เกรียงไกร’ ถึง ‘ประยุทธ์’ 30 ปี ฉายาจะสิ้นอาถรรพ์ ‘มุกดาโมนด์’” [Tracing the Saudi Diamond, from “Kriangkrai” to “Prayut” over 30 years, whether the curse of the “Blue Diamond” is over]. *Manager Online*, 25 January 2022 (<https://www.mgronline.com/crime/detail/9650000008162>, accessed 27 January 2022). Kriangkrai Techamong was the Thai janitor who stole more than US\$20 million worth of jewellery from a Saudi prince, loot that he smuggled back to Thailand. He was duly arrested. But a very senior police officer, Police Lt Gen Cha-lor Kerdted organised a bloody scheme to embezzle many pieces of the confiscated jewellery. He later led a team of Thai officials to return the stolen jewellery to Saudi Arabia; it turned out that many of the returned pieces were fake. Three Saudi detectives sent to Bangkok to investigate and reportedly to look for the missing “Blue Diamond” were mysteriously murdered. Subsequently, the Saudi government recalled its ambassador to Thailand and practically downgraded diplomatic ties with Bangkok to the *chargé d'affaires* level. It also expelled all Thai workers and banned them from Saudi Arabia, where over 300,000 Thais used to work.

⁶ The prime minister announced on his Facebook page, www.facebook.com/prayutofficial, on 26 January, “very good news” for the peoples of Thailand and Saudi Arabia resulting from his recent official visit to Riyadh. The good news included an upcoming exchange of ambassadors and the resumption of direct flights between the two kingdoms in May.

⁷ The “expulsion” occurred without any formal internal investigation. Some MPs who wanted to leave the party had to lobby their fellow MPs in the PPP to vote for the “expulsion”. MPs expelled from a party may retain their House membership by joining a new party within 30 days. But MPs who resign from their party automatically forfeit House membership.

⁸ “ ‘ธรรมนัส’ นำ 18 สส. ขบ ‘เศรษฐกิจไทย’ ... ” [‘Thammanat leads 18 MPs to join ‘Thai Economic Party’ ...], *Manager Online*, 29 January 2022 (<https://www.mgronline.com/politics/detail/9650000009505>, accessed 30 January 2022).

⁹ The ruling coalition has 10 micro-parties, nine of them has only one MP each, while the tenth, the Forest Conservation of Thailand Party, has two MPs. Captain Thammanat once described the leaders of these micro-parties as “monkeys”, and he called himself the “monkey-keeper” who has to find “bananas” to feed to them.

¹⁰ “30ปีไม่เคยพูดที่ไหน ‘ธรรมนัส’ เปิดใจ ‘ผมเป็นเส้นเลือดหัวใจรัฐบาล’” [Never before in 30 years, “Thammanat” discloses he is the “artery of the government”] *Thai PBS News*, 12 July 2019 (<https://news.thaipbs.or.th/content/281649>, accessed 31 January 2022). Captain Thammanat gave a long press conference at the parliament to defend himself against accusations that he had a “shady past”, including imprisonment in an Australian prison on a heroin-related conviction in the mid-1980s. The Constitutional Court in May 2021 ruled that the conviction against Captain Thammanat took place outside Thailand, and thus had no legal bearing on Captain Thammanat’s qualification to hold public office in the country. This was when Captain Thammanat also likened himself to the “main artery” of the government, and accused his opponents of trying to attack him in order to topple the government.

¹¹ One of the 500 MPs, Future Forward party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, was disqualified from House membership on the opening day of the first parliamentary session after the 2019 elections on being accused of breaking the election law in failing to declare his ownership of shares in a media firm. Thanathorn was also subsequently found guilty of illegally lending more than 100 million baht to fund his own party, resulting in a decision by the Constitutional Court to dissolve the Future Forward Party in February 2020.

¹² Thammanat was sacked as a deputy minister of agriculture following his failed attempt to unseat the prime minister in the no-confidence debate in early last September. Thammanat appears to want to regain the deputy minister post for one of the MPs in his group, because it oversees the Agricultural Land Reform Office – crucial in winning the votes of the landless rural poor. Thammanat himself seems to want to return to the cabinet as the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment.

¹³ The two are the minister of natural resources and the environment and deputy minister of agriculture, whose incumbents are, respectively Varawut Silpa-acha and Praphat Phothesothon.

¹⁴ See the author's article, "Thailand's Main Opposition Party Hopes for a Landslide Election Victory: A Realistic Goal or Just a Dream", *ISEAS Perspective* 2021/161, 8 December 2021 (<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-161-thailands-main-opposition-party-hopes-for-a-landslide-election-victory-a-realistic-goal-or-just-a-dream-by-termsak-chalermpanupap/>, accessed 18 January 2022).

¹⁵ On 4 February, the House had only 195 MPs present, whereas the minimum number of MPs in attendance must be at least 237 to form a quorum. Among the PT's 131 MPs, only two reported their attendance. From the PPP, only 54 MPs of the chief government party's 97 MPs were in attendance. And only one from Captain Thammanat's faction of 18 MPs reported his attendance. The PPP leadership later explained that many of the party's MPs were absent because they had commitments in their constituencies in the provinces on the Friday in question. Normal legislative work in the House are is on Wednesday and Thursday. Friday meetings are sometimes convened to listen to reports from various House *ad hoc* bodies, and thus are not considered crucial to attend. PPP leader General Prawit has asked all of the PPP's MPs to attend every House meeting in order to foil the PT's sabotage tactics.

¹⁶ Thaksin has been in overseas exile, living mostly in Dubai, after fleeing Thailand in early August 2008 to avoid a two-year jail term from conviction in a conflict-of-interest case. The two-year jail term was meted out in October 2008. The penalty lapsed in October 2018 after 10 years. However, Thaksin is still facing altogether 10 years of imprisonment for three *in absentia* convictions: two years for illegally trying to introduce a two-digit and three-digit (Lotto-like) lottery to compete with the government's lottery monopoly; three years for pressuring Thailand's Export-Import Bank to lend Myanmar 40,000 million baht for the purchase of satellite equipment from Shin Satellite Co, a public company founded by Thaksin; and five years for abusing his official powers to benefit Shin Corp, another public company that he had founded. Moreover, Thaksin has also been implicated in the controversial paddy-pawning scheme and fictitious sale of rice to a non-existent Chinese buyer during the administration of his younger sister Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Yingluck was found guilty of dereliction of duty and sentenced to five years in jail on charges related to that scheme, but she fled the country in August 2017, just a few days before the verdict on her conviction was read in court. She is now in exile together with Thaksin in Dubai. See details of Thaksin's convictions at “บทสรุปหรือ 5 คดี ‘ทักษิณ’ ศาลฎีกาฯ สั่งจำคุกกรรม 10 ปี – ยังเหลือข่าวจู่โจม ป.ป.ช.?” [Summary of five cases against “Thaksin”. Appeals court has sentenced him to altogether 10 years in jail. Still there is a case of G-to-G rice sale in the National Anti-Corruption Commission?], *Isra News*, 31 July 2020 (<https://www.isranews.org/article/isranews-scoop/90809-isranews-56.html>, accessed 20 January 2022).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “‘เดินหน้ายุบเพื่อไทย! ‘เรื่องไกร’ ยื่น กกต. สอบ ‘ชลน่าน’ พิสูจน์ ‘ทักษิณ’ เป็นเจ้าของพรรคตั้งลบชื่อ ‘พัลลภ’ ” [Attempt to dissolve Phuea Thai, “Ruerng-grai” requests EC to question “Cholnan” to prove that “Thaksin” is the owner of the party who ordered deleting the name of “Panlop” from the party’s membership], *Thai Post*, 4 January 2022 (<https://www.thaipost.net/hi-light/57617>, accessed 18 January 2022). Ruerng-grai is a lawyer representing the PPP. He has asked the Election Commission to question PT party leader Dr Cholnan Sri-kaew following a widely-publicised complaint by General Panlop Pin-manee, a former deputy director of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) and a former senior member of the PT, that he could not attend the recent PT party meeting in Khon Kaen, because Thaksin had allegedly ordered the deletion of his name from the party’s membership rolls. Dr Cholnan, however, has countered that General Panlop remains a life-time member of the PT, but that he was not allowed into the Khon Kaen meeting because of COVID-19 restrictions forcing the PT to limit attendance by not inviting older members. See “‘สนธิญา’ ไม่ปล่อย! ฟ้องยุบพรรคเพื่อไทยปม ‘วิฑูรย์ - พัลลภ’ ” [“Sonthiya” will not let go! Suing for dissolution of the Phuea Thai Party because of “Vithoon – Panlop”], *Thai Post*, 12 January 2022 (<https://www.thaipost.net/politics-news/62980>). In his case lodged with the Election Commission, Sonthiya Sawaddee, a conservative royalist, cited the complaint made by General Panlop and a new revelation from Vithoon Nambutr, a former deputy leader of the Democrat Party who wanted to join the PT. Vithoon has claimed that he talked to Thaksin on the phone to seek support for his inclusion on the PT’s party list for allocation of the 100 party-list seats in the House after the next general election in a rank no lower than the thirtieth. Thaksin allegedly agreed. However, PT party leader Dr Cholnan has clarified that it will be up to the PT’s executive committee – not Thaksin or any other outsider – to compile the new party-list, and that the ranking has not yet been done because the next general election has not yet been scheduled.

¹⁹ “เปิดผลคะแนนผู้สมัครรับเลือกตั้งซ่อม ส.ส. เขต 9 กทม.” [Voting results for candidates in the by-election for Bangkok Constituency No. 9 by-election], *Thai Post*, 30 January 2022 (<https://www.thaipost.net/hi-light/75938>, accessed 30 January 2022). PT’s candidate Surachart won with 29,416 votes; followed by the Move Forward candidate Karoonpol with 20,361, Kla’s Arthawit with 20,047 votes, and PPP’s Saranras with 7,906 votes.

²⁰ Captain Thammanat made his worst mistake at a big rally one week before the voting on 16 January, when he told voters in Songkhla to choose the PPP’s candidate because he was wealthy and would thus be in a position to assist local people who were in need. The Democrats immediately seized on Captain Thammanat’s words as an “insult” to southern voters, accusing him of trying to win the by-election with a promise of money.

²¹ Four of the party’s leaders became prime ministers of Thailand in nine governments: Khuang Abhaiwong (1944-1945, January – March 1946, February - April 1948), Seni Pramoj (1945 – 1946, February – March 1975, and April – September 1976), Chuan Leekpai (1992 – 1995, 1997 – 2001), and Abhisit Vejjajiva (December 2008 – August 2011).

²² Democrat party leader Jurin Laksanawisit considers it to be “political etiquette” not to contest in a by-election in which another party in the ruling coalition is trying to defend its House seat.

²³ The full reports of the ninth NIDA Poll survey, conducted between 23-25 December 2021 are available at https://www.nidapoll-nida.ac.th/survey_detail?survey_id=538, first published on 27 December 2021 (accessed on 18 January 2022).

²⁴ “‘Jurin’ โยนทีมหาเสียงประสาน ‘อภิสิทธิ์’ ช่วยสนามผู้ว่า กทม.” [“Jurin” let campaign team contact “Abhisit” for help in the Bangkok governor’s race], *Thai Post*, 22 December 2021 (<https://www.thaipost.net/politics-news/50699>, accessed 18 January 2022). Jurin Laksanawisit is leader of the Democrat Party, the successor to Abhisit who stepped down immediately after the party’s disastrous loss in the 2019 general election.

²⁵ Eleven MPs have joined the Bhumjaithai Party during the two years since the 2019 general election. An MP for Chiang Mai, Srinuan Boun-lue, was expelled from the Future Forward Party

in December 2019; nine MPs from the Future Forward Party signed on after that party's dissolution in February 2020; and one MP for Pathum Thani, Pornpimon Thammasarn, was expelled from the PT in December 2021 and then joined Bhumjaithai. MPs expelled from a party have 30 days to join a new party in order to keep their House membership. MPs from a dissolved party, like those from the Future Forward Party, have 60 days to do likewise.

²⁶ “ภูมิไทย์ไทย ชูปลูกกัญชาเสรี สร้างรายได้ ปชช. ทั่วประเทศ” [Bhumjaithai advocates free growing of marijuana for income generation of all people], *Khao Sod*, 17 March 2019

(https://www.khaosod.co.th/politics/news_2100949, accessed 20 January 2022).

²⁷ “อนูทิน ย้ำกัญชาไม่ใช่พืชยาเสพติด ใช้ทางการแพทย์ได้ เน้นดูเจตนาการนำไปใช้” [Anutin emphasises that marijuana is not a narcotic plant, it has medical use, and [the authorities] should look at the intention of its usage], *Infoquest Online*, 12 January 2022 (<https://www.infoquest.co.th/2022/163704>, accessed 20 January 2022).

²⁸ In the by-elections held on 16 January, Move Forward's candidate in Songkhla received only 5,417 votes, compared with 11,966 votes for Future Forward's candidate in the same constituency in the 2019 general election; similarly, its candidate in Chumphon received only 3,520 votes, compared with 10,347 votes for Future Forward's candidate in the 2019 general election. Move Forward's setback is worse than anticipated. In the recent by-elections, the winners in Songkhla and Chumphon, both from the Democrat Party, received 45,578 votes and 48,981 votes, respectively. See “สรุปผลเลือกตั้งซ่อม ส.ส. ชุมพร -- สงขลา” [Summary of the by-elections outcome in Chumphon – Songkhla], *Thai Post*, 17 January 2022 (<https://www.thaipost.net/hi-light/66159>, accessed 20 January 2022).

²⁹ See details of the 84 parties at the web site of the Office of the Election Commission at https://www.ect.go.th/ect_th/download/article/article_20211230211301.pdf, accessed 19 January 2022).

³⁰ “‘อุตตม – สันธิรัตน์’ เปิดตัว ‘พรรคสร้างอนาคตไทย’ รวมบุคลากรหัวกระทิชูจุดยืนไม่โกงไม่ปล้นชาติ” [“Uttama – Sonthirat” unveil “Sang Anakhot Thai Party” with top-class personnel, as well as a pledge of no corruption and no plundering], *Manager Online*, 19 January 2022

(<https://www.mgsonline.com/politics/detail/9650000006035>, accessed 19 January 2022).

³¹ *Ibid.*

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