

Thailand: The king's personal monopoly over royal assets criticized in the November 25 protest

Friday 27 November 2020, by [PRACHATAI](#) (Date first published: 27 November 2020).

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A small crowd already began gathering at the SCB headquarters by 13.50 of 25 November, while SCB had announced earlier in the morning that its headquarters would be closed for the day.



The crowd control police stationed at the SCB HQs.

The protest was originally planned to take place at the Crown Property Bureau (CPB). The student activist group Free Youth announced that the protest would start at the Democracy Monument, before marching to the CPB. The organizers later changed the venue to the SCB headquarters due to the authorities' heavy deployment of security measures.

At 14.50, police officers were stationed around the SCB Park Plaza building behind metal railings, but there are no other barriers. The protesters then accumulated in numbers until by dusk they occupied the street.

The yellow rubber duck seems to have become an icon of the pro-democracy protests, after inflatable ducks were used as makeshift shields against water cannon blasts during the crackdown on the 17 November protest at Parliament.

A protester had made coupons with the image of the rubber duck, worth 10 baht, which could be exchanged at 10 street food vendors (nicknamed "CIA" by protesters) who are participating in the

activity.



A protester with the duck coupon.

The protesters dispersed at 21.17. The next protest is scheduled for 27 November at a place and time to be announced later.

At 22.13, after the protest had largely dispersed, a small explosive-like sound was heard, then followed by 4 sounds like gunshots. As of 26 November, there were reports that one person was shot in the stomach. He was taken to hospital and is out of danger. Protest guards caught 2 people suspected of being the perpetrators but the situation is still unclear.

Protest against monopolizing crown assets

Founded by Prince Mahisara Rajaharudaya, a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn, and established by Royal Charter in 1907, SCB is Thailand's first commercial bank. According to the SCB website, King Vajiralongkorn is the largest single shareholder, holding 23.53% of SCB's shares.

The stocks were transferred in 2018 from the CPB, the organization that controlled royal assets on behalf of the monarchy, to His Majesty's personal property along with many other assets, due to the changes enacted in the Crown Property Act. This issue has been raised by speakers in this protest.

The status of CPB is an enigma and it has long been questioned whether its assets belong to the country, especially when Forbes calculated the assets of King Rama IX by including those of the CPB. The CPB in the past explained that the property of the monarch is the property of the state and of the country, managed by the government through the Minister of Finance as the chair of the governing board.

This explanation became invalid in 2017, when the junta-appointed National Legislative Assembly passed the 2017 Crown Property Act and the next year passed the 2018 Crown Property Act to replace the former version. [The 2 laws have slightly different names in Thai but the same name in the official English translation].

The reason for passing a new law was to make the regulations for the administration of crown property more suitable by presenting the management of crown property to be at the royal pleasure as a royal prerogative.

The essential points of the 2018 Crown Property Act are:

1. The literal translation of the name of the Act in Thai is "Act on the Organization of the Property of the Monarch". The 2017 Act was "Act on the Organization of Property on behalf of the Monarch". There is no longer any language indicating that the monarch does not directly own the property.
2. There is no division between the personal property of His Majesty and property held for the

monarch. Both become the property of the monarch.

3. Crown property is taxable according to the law.

4. The Crown Property Committee is appointed at the royal pleasure.



Parit Chiwarak in a duck outfit.

Parit Chiwarak, a student activist who has addressed the monarchy reform issue, and who had just been summoned by the police to hear a *lèse majesté* charge, appeared on the stage in a yellow duck outfit. He said that it is in the national interest to demand the King's personal assets to be restored as public crown assets.

Parit questioned the transfer of public assets into the King's personal assets, which has made him the main stakeholder in some of the country's biggest companies like SCB and Siam Cement Group (SCG), while the people at the bottom still struggle with poverty and inequality in daily life. These resources should be allocated to improve the quality of life of the people.

One of the demands made in the 10-point manifesto declared by the student activist group United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration on 10 August calls for the 2018 Crown Property Act to be revoked and for there to be a clear division between the assets of the king under the control of the Ministry of Finance and his personal assets.

Anon Nampa, a human rights lawyer, a prominent monarchy reform speaker and a man on the Section 112 charge list along with Parit, appeared at the stage in the SCB protest in a yellow chicken (perhaps meant to be a duck) outfit.



Anon Nampa, also in a duck outfit.

He said the past 4 months have been the greatest beginning in the history of Thailand when people voiced their concerns that monarchy is having problems. Since King Rama X took the throne, instead of behaving under the constitution, he seems to behave in another way.

By the transfer of assets to the King, the coup led by Gen Prayut betrayed the country and the People's Party who staged the democratic revolution and separated public assets from royal assets.

He said that the Crown Property Act is problematic due to the status of royal assets in the past. For example, why would the assets that used to belong to royal families not be distributed among its

members. Moreover, if the King decided to transfer the Grand Palace to the Queen, which the law allows him to do, the Queen could also transfer the palace to her mother.

Also, if the King, who holds all the crown assets personally, does not bequeath the assets to anyone, then on his death, the assets will be divided among his spouses and offspring according to civil law. That would be a major controversy, involving what used to be regarded as the national treasure. Those are reasons for the protest, because the people are stakeholders in this issue.

“We are speaking out because want future kings to have palaces to stay in. If the king happens to make a will transferring assets to someone else, we would have nothing left as public [assets]. And if he transfers everything, where would the new king stay?” asked Anon.

“We do not only protest and go home. We have a legal exit. We are going to collectively submit a new law, bringing all of the assets that His Majesty has taken back to Parliament. This issue can be done without any blood being shed.

“We will draft the law making a clear separation. Oversight will be by the government that we elect to oversee the country. We will hand the assets from the throne over to the government to oversee. This is only one from ten demands and we have many more places that we wish to go, and the containers cannot contain us.”, said Anon

Tough state defence against protesters

At 22.26 on 24 November, Free Youth announced a change of location to the Siam Commercial Bank (SCB) headquarters on Ratchadaphisek Road in order to avoid clashing with a pro-establishment rally, saying that there will be a team at the Democracy Monument to re-direct protesters to the right location.

Khaosod English [1] reported that the authorities blocked a number of streets and intersections around the Crown Property Bureau with stacks of shipping containers and razor wire ahead of the protest, and that there were plainclothes officers stationed in the area, “dressed suspiciously like pro-democracy protesters” with hard hats and backpacks.

There were also reports of Long-Range Acoustic Devices (LRAD) in the area, as well as of officers rehearsing crowd control drills.

The logistics company Maersk, whose containers were seen among those used to block the streets, said on their official Facebook page [2] that the containers are not owned by the company but were sold to a third party without Maersk knowing the intended use.

iLaw [3] also reported at around 23.00 last night that officers were seen installing CCTV cameras in front of the SCB headquarters.

Later on 25 November, Deputy Bangkok Police Commander Maj Gen Piya Tawichai apologized to the public for blocking roads in a wide area. He said the measure was in response to the protesters. (Source: Bangkokbiznews)

Prachatai

P.S.

• Prachatai. Submitted on Fri, 27 Nov 2020 - 11:40 AM:

<https://prachatai.com/journal/2020/11/90570>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/news/crimecourtscalamity/2020/11/25/shipping-containers-r-azor-wires-put-up-for-a-non-existing-protest/>

[2] <https://www.facebook.com/Maersk/posts/3842591032450461>

[3] <https://twitter.com/iLawFX/status/1331269866586718208?s=20>