

Thailand: Former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra flee the country before her Rice Pledging Scheme's judgement day

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Yingluck has gone but what has she left?

After being on trial for more than two years, former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra ultimately decided to flee the country before her Rice Pledging Scheme's judgement day.

Her destination remains unconfirmed though media have made various guesses including Singapore, Dubai and the UK. Some sources even reported that her brother and former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra sent a personal jet to pick up Yingluck from Singapore and transfer her to Dubai.

But more important than "where is she?" is the question "what is her legacy?". On one hand, Yingluck's political opponents now have more grounds to condemn her party and supporters for disrespecting the justice system, just as when Thaksin fled the country in 2008. Many of Yingluck's detractors reacted to the flight with sarcastic comments.

"At first, I was glad that [she] was coming to hear [the verdict]. I was happy and the court was going to take care of her by conducting a fair trial. But then, oh! Absent again!" remarked the junta head.

Suthep Thaugsuban, the leader of the People's Democratic Reform Committee, promised through a Facebook live session that in contrast to Yingluck, he and other leaders will not flee the prosecution they are facing for disrupting the 2014 election.

Among the most controversial condemnations of Yingluck came in the form of a sexist poem by the national artist Paitoon Thanya. The poem has triggered public anger due to its joking about Yingluck's genitals. A campaign on change.org has been created to collect signatures of those who want to dismiss Paitoon from his position as a national artist, while 75 artists, writers and academics published a joint statement condemning his poem.

But Yingluck's criticisms have been made on the assumption that Thailand's justice system is fair and impartial. Not only was Yingluck charged with being responsible for corruption committed by other officials, the charges are also based on the huge deficits of the RPS — even though policies that run deficits are not a usual cause for prosecution.

Since it is unusual for a Prime Minister to be prosecuted for corruption that they did not commit themselves, state agencies were initially hesitant to pursue the case. The junta therefore invoked

Article 44 in late 2016 to grant legal immunity to officials involved in the prosecution, meaning that they cannot be held accountable if the prosecution is later proved malicious or unfair to Yingluck.

An excessive punishment for corruption has already been levied by Yingluck's Commerce Minister Boonsong Teriyapirom. His verdict of 42 years in prison was read last Friday. Compared with other large-scale corruption cases, Boonsong's punishment is flagrantly excessive.

In 2012, the Supreme Court ruled Amares Silaon, a former president of the Financial Sector Restructuring Authority, guilty of corruption. He was responsible for managing the debts of 58 finance institutes after the Tom Yam Kung Crisis. The national loss that Amares created was estimated at over 8 thousand trillion [1], while RPS's losses are valued at only some 500 billion baht. But Amares only received a two year prison sentence, with a three year suspended term, 20,000 baht fine and 24 hours of social service. He was also acquitted in 2014 by the Appeal Court [2]

Yingluck's flight is a reminder of Thailand's (in)justice system remains biased towards particular political affiliations, problematising condemnations of Yingluck's decision to leave the country.

Another case last week that showcased the darkness of Thailand's justice system was the levying of the death penalty against four anti-PDRC shooters. Four individuals were been convicted of murder, possessions of weapons of war, and carrying illegal weapons in public for allegedly using M79 grenade launchers to shoot at anti-election protesters in 2014.

But the ruling came after the court dismissed allegations that the four were tortured into confessing. The Supreme Court reduced the sentence to life imprisonment after the defendants pleaded guilty.

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* Posted: 28 Aug 2017 07:10 AM PDT:

<https://prachatai.com/english/node/7348?utm>

Yingluck's Commerce Minister gets 42 years in prison over rice deal

The Supreme Court has sentenced a former Commerce Minister in the Yingluck government to 42 years in prison for corruption over rice export deals.

On 25 August 2017, the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Holders of Political Positions sentenced Boonsong Teriyapirom, a Commerce Minister in the Yingluck administration, to 42 years in prison while Poom Sarapol, his former deputy, received 36 years.

The two were accused of violating a 1999 law against price collusion for helping Chinese companies that did not represent the Chinese government to obtain government-to-government rice export deals under the Yingluck administration.

The court also sentenced Manas Soiploy, former director-general of the Department of Foreign Trade, to 40 years in prison, and his deputy Tikhumporn Natvaratat to 32 years, for their involvement in the deals.

Akharaphong Theepwatchara, former director of the Department's Rice Trade Administration

Bureau, was sentenced to 24 years while Apichart Chansakulporn, an executive of Siam Indica Co. Ltd., the rice exporting company, got 48 years.

The court also ordered Siam Indica to pay 16.9 billion baht in damages to the Ministry of Finance.

Eight of the total of 28 accused were acquitted while the rest got jail term and were ordered to pay damages in proportion to their involvement in the rice deal.

In 2012, opposition Members of Parliament, led by the Democrat Party, accused the Yingluck administration of corruption over alleged irregularities in four government-to-government rice deals in which the government claimed to have sold rice to China-based Guangdong Stationery & Sporting Goods Import & Export Corp. and Hainan Grain and Oil Industrial Trading Company. The total rice exports to the two Chinese companies amounted to 67.7 billion baht.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission accused Boonsong and others of fabricating the deals with the Chinese firms, which were not acting on behalf of the Chinese government and which sold the rice back to Siam Indica.

* Fri, 25/08/2017 - 17:32

<https://prachatai.com/english/node/7344?utm>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.thairath.co.th/content/463670>

[2] <http://englishnews.thaipbs.or.th/ex-fra-chairman-secretary-general-acquitted/>