

Thailand: A week of student demonstrations

Thursday 5 March 2020, by [PRACHATAI](#) (Date first published: 27 February 2020).

Student demonstrations have broken out in universities across the country since the dissolution of the Future Forward Party last Friday (21 February) [1], as students speak out against the government both online and offline.



On Friday night (21 February), after the Constitutional Court delivered its verdict in the afternoon, around 300 students at the Rangsit campus of Thammasat University gathered around the statues of Puey Ungphakorn and Pridi Banomyong at the Puey Ungphakorn Centenary Park to light candles in a symbolic action against injustice and the use of the judicial system for political purposes.

At 17.30 on Saturday (22 February), the Student Union of Thailand organized a flash mob at the Pridi Banomyong Plaza at Thammasat University's Tha Prachan Campus in a similar protest against injustice following the dissolution of FFP. Two pieces of white cloth were laid out on the ground for people to write messages expressing their anger at the government. Both were filled in around 30 minutes.

The flash mob concluded after the protestors lit candles and sang Jit Phumisak's song "Starlight of Faith" and Jin Kammachon's "Phuea muan chon."



The demonstration at Thammasat University's Rangsit Campus on Saturday night. Students have placed candles between and in the hands of the statues of Puey Ungphakorn and Pridi Banomyong. (Picture from TUTV)

Meanwhile, at Chiang Mai University, a group of students came out to Ang Kaew, the on-campus reservoir, with a sign saying "stop injustice." The event was observed by both university personnel and plainclothes police officers.

The Chiang Mai University Student Union also issued a statement expressing their support for the FFP and asking former party members and their supporters to "hold on to democratic ideals" and that the Student Union will "stand with the people who hold on to the way of democracy."

On the same day (22 February), a group of Naresuan University students also came out to protest.



Chiang Mai University students with a sign saying “Stop injustice”

On Sunday (23 February), at Burapha University, students from the Political Science Student Union and Kong Kang Group came together in front of the Faculty of Political Science and Law building. They lit candles and held up a banner saying “lighting candles for justice.”

Representatives of the students, the Student Union, and the Kong Kang Group took turns giving speeches calling for justice and a true democratic process, and encouraged the students to keep fighting and to not lose hope.

The organizers said that they did not organize the event just to support the FFP, but because Thai politics has gotten to a point where there is injustice, and they are calling for this to be the last time something like this happens.



The demonstration at Burapha University on Sunday night

Student organizations in several universities also issued statements raising concerns about the Constitutional Court’s ruling to dissolve the FFP, including at the Faculty of Political Science, Srinakharinwirot University; the Democracy Club at the Chiang Mai University Student Union; the Chulalongkorn University Faculty of Political Science Student Union; Thammasat University, and Thammasat University’s Faculty of Political Science Student Committee.

Four protests took place on Monday (24 February). Around noon at Chulalongkorn University, students at the Faculty of Arts gathered in front of the faculty building, where they placed a wreath with a sign saying “R.I.P Democracy.” Pieces of paper were scattered around the wreath, and the organizers invited the passing students to come in and write messages to the government.



The “R.I.P Democracy” wreath placed in front of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University building on Monday (24 February)

The papers were quickly filled with messages like “respect our votes,” “I was betrayed by the system,” and “dissolve any party and I still won’t vote for you,” alongside quotes from literature and messages in a variety of other languages from French to Arabic.

“Right now, it’s obvious that the legal system, the rule of law, and things like that, they have all failed,” said one student who were at the protest. “This is because a group of people want to accumulate power and benefit from taxpayer money, so we, who are the taxpayers, have the right to come out and protest, because something that is not normal is happening, and we are really affected. Right now, everything is bad, the economy or politics, and we don’t even have the right or liberty to go out and protest.”

“Maybe people have put up with it for the past six years, but right now the government is making us feel like we are not ourselves, but we are only something for them to trample on,” said another, “and right now it is a sign that what the government is doing is playing with fire.”

The organizers, who said they didn’t expect such a large turnout, said that they want those in power to see that the students no longer submit to what they are doing.

“They think that they have the power to control us, and that we won’t react, but we want to show them that we are reacting,” said one of the organizers.

“Actually, if they are saying that they are doing what they do for the country, for the country’s future, and the future is the younger generation, it is the future that wants him out,” another organizer said. “This is the answer, that they should no longer stay, because the future doesn’t want them.”

In the evening, students filled the plaza next to the Chulalongkorn University auditorium in an anti-government protest. The organizers took turns giving speeches, before inviting anyone who had something to say to come up to speak. They repeatedly referred to each other as the “citizens” who hold real power in this country, and one of the organizers said that they are there “not for the love of the Future Forward Party[...]but for [their] abhorrence of the government.”



Two students at the protest at Chulalongkorn University with signs saying “I won’t surrender to tyrants” and “We want democracy back.”

They also sang Jit Phumisak’s “Starlight of Faith” and Chiranan Pitpreecha’s “Flowers Will Bloom.” Jit was an alumni of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, and in October 1953, Jit was thrown from the stage in the university auditorium after he attempted to add progressive content to the annual university magazine - the very auditorium next to the plaza in which the students were protesting by singing one of his songs.

The protest concluded with the students singing “Do You Hear the People Sing?” while lighting candles and turning on the flashlights on their phones. The organizers then asked the students to help clean up the area before leaving.

Another protest took place around 17:30 in front of the main auditorium at Kasetsart University, where both students and members of the public gathered to listen to speeches and write messages on a banner.



Participants in the protest at Kasetsart University using the flashlight on their phones in place of candles during the protest.

Meanwhile, at the Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, lecturers and students from the Political Science Department organized a candlelit vigil for the injustice in the society. A representative of the students read a statement, which said that they “would like to express [their] disagreement and sadness at the injustice done against the 6 million voters who chose the Future Forward Party to represent them in parliament.”

The statement also said that “we realize the injustice done against the Future Forward Party, but we won’t ask those in power to respect the people’s right and voices, because for the past five years, you have shown that you do not believe in democracy, but we would like to call on our fellow students and on the people to express, as they have the right and liberty to do, that we do not agree, that we are concerned about the judicial process and independent organizations that were appointed by those in power.”

Seven other protests took place on Tuesday (25 February): at Mahidol University, Chiang Mai University, Bangkok University, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Mae Jo University, Ubon Ratchathani University, and Lampang Rajabhat University.



Protestors holding up the three-finger “Hunger Games” salute at the demonstration at the Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi (Photo by Kotcharak Kaewsurach)



Tuesday’s protest at Chiang Mai University - the second protest at CMU this week. (Source: CMU Democracy Club)



Tuesday night's protest at Mahidol University's Salaya Campus

On Wednesday (26 February), fourteen protests took place across the country. At Thammasat University's Rangsit Campus, over a thousand students joined the demonstration against the government and the dissolution of the FFP.



Protestors filled the King of Naga Courtyard at Thammasat University's Rangsit Campus on Wednesday night

They also denounced Anawin Rattanastaporn, a former FFP MP for Pathum Thani's Constituency 3, where Thammasat University's Rangsit Campus is located, who was among the nine MPs who joined the pro-government Bhumjaithai Party following the FFP dissolution.

As students who live in dorms on the Rangsit Campus have to move into the university's household registry, it is likely that Anawin won most of his votes during the 2019 general election from students who support the FFP.



A picture of former FFP MP Anawin, which the students have written on, and also drawn a snake's tongue coming out of his mouth. The message in the black box read "Anawin betrayed the people."

Student activist Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, gave a speech at the rally saying that the students will hold another demonstration after their mid-term examinations are over.

Meanwhile, at Burapha University, over 1000 students gathered in front of the university auditorium for an anti-government demonstration, with representatives of the organizers, students, and members of the public giving speeches on everything from democracy and human rights to employment issues and high tuition fees. The rap group Rap Against Dictatorship (RAD) also performed at the rally.



A panoramic view of the protest at Burapha University

Around 20 plainclothes and uniformed police officers observed the demonstration. Earlier, students had seen university personnel taking down the posters around campus announcing the event. One member of the Kong Kang Group, a student group who first announced the event, also told Thai Lawyers for Human Rights that they received a call from a person who claimed to be a public security officer asking about the event and asking to “take you out for a meal.” However, they did not obstruct the demonstration as it was taking place.

At Khon Kaen University, at least a thousand students came together to protest against the government, using the hashtag #KKUEnoughisenough (#KKUEnoughisenough), in which a representative of the students read a statement calling for their fellow students and the younger generation to speak up. Jatupat “Pai Dao Din” Boonpattaraksa also gave a speech during the protest, and asked the students to do the three-finger salute with him to protest against the dictatorship government.



Since the university refused to turn on the spotlight around the protest area, the students lit up the lawn with the flashlights on their phones.

Jatupat and four other members of the Dai Din Group were taken into a military camp in November 2014 for giving Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha the three-finger salute while wearing shirts saying “no coup.”

The students then danced together to the song “Thung Lui Lai” before dispersing.

At Silpakorn University’s Wang Tha Phra Campus, students gathered around the statue of university founder Silpa Bhirasri, where they wrote messages to the government on a banner and sang together before ending the protest.



The demonstration at Silpakorn University’s Wang Tha Phra Campus, with the statue of Silpa Bhirasri in the centre.

Simultaneous protests were also held at the Sanam Chandra Palace Campus in Nakhon Pathom, and at the Phetchaburi Campus.

At Srinakharinwirot University's Prasarnmit Campus, over 1000 students came together around the flag pole, where they placed wreaths with messages like "to the lost voices of the people."



The wreaths placed around the flag pole at Srinakharinwirot University

At the Prince of Songkla University's Pattani Campus, around 200 students came together to protest against the undemocratic government, and called for the resignation of those who are appointed to offices in independent organizations by the NCPO, of Gen Prayut, and for a new constitution.

Other protests also took place at the King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Walailak University, Udon Thani Rajabhat University, Rajabhat Rajanagarindra University, and the Suratthani Rajabhat University.



Protestors at Walailak University using their phones' flashlights inplace of candles.



Protestors at Walailak University holding up the three-finger salute. The sign to the top right of the picture is quoting a line from Jit Phumisak's "Starlight of Faith," a common protest song in Thailand.

Some high schools have now announced their own campaigns. After the school denied them permission to protest on school grounds, around 30 Satriwithaya School students stood in front of the school with their protest signs, before walking over to the nearby Democracy Monument, where they stood with their back to the monument and held up their hands in the well-known three-finger "Hunger Games" salute. Some students then went to join the protest at Silpakorn University.

Students at Triam Udom Suksa School also came together on Thursday morning (27 February), with

face masks and protest signs, while students at Benchama Maharat School in Ubon Ratchathani are planning a demonstration in the evening of the same day.



A protest sign at Triam Udom Suksa School read “whose future if not ours?”

One of the Triam Udom Suksa student representatives gave a speech saying “we have many alumni who joined the fight for democracy. We have an upperclassman named Jit Phumisak who fought. We have an upperclassman named Wichitchai Amornkul, who joined the fight during the 6 October Massacre, and was then hanged and his body was beaten with a chair. We have an upperclassman named Nutta Mahattanaa, an activist who fight for human rights, and we have an upperclassman named Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit. Isn’t it wrong to stop of us from expressing ourselves?”

Students at Suankularb Wittayalai School and Bodindecha School have started their own online campaigns, inviting people to express their opinion through their hashtags.

Seven other protests are scheduled to take place on Thursday (27 February): at Ramkhamhaeng University, Rangsit University, Nakhon Phanom University, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, Sripatum University, Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, Kasetsart University’s Sriracha Campus, and Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University.

Other protests are also planned for Friday (28 February) at the University of Phayao and the Lampang Rajabhat University, while Thai students in London, using the hashtag #WeAreInUKButWeAreNotOK (#เราอยู่ในUK但我们不是OK), are planning to meet at 17:00 GMT at SOAS, University of London.

As Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) noted, the 2015 Public Assembly Act does not apply to assembly within an educational institution, according to Section 3 Clause 4 of the Act. Organizers of assemblies on a university campus or on school ground therefore do not have to notify the authorities as required by the Act.

TLHR also noted that, in this case, police officers have no authority to allow or not allow a rally to take place, or to obstruct or set up a condition for any rally taking place within a university or school, and cannot arrest or charge anyone with charges under the Public Assembly Act, with the exception of other criminal charges.

TLHR also noted, in a comment replying to one of its readers, that university regulations are not laws written by the legislature, and therefore cannot be used to limit freedom of assembly and cannot be used to punish those who exercise their freedom of assembly.

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- Prachatai. Submitted on Thu, 27 Feb 2020 - 03:52 PM:
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Footnotes

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