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Difficulties Ahead as Obstacles to the New Thai Government Under the Move Forward Party (MFP) Leader Pita Limjaroenrat's Political Position as PM is in Jeopardy

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Abstract

This paper is about the Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt revealed that a Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) civil engineer attempted to solicit a 300,000-baht bribe from a construction company. The governor stands firm to take appropriate action by dismissing the corrupt officer. Chadchart together with the chiefs of 50 districts in Bangkok which is preparing to host the highly anticipated World Pride event in 2571, with Move Forward Party (MFP) leader and deputy prime minister Pita Limjaroenrat unveiling the 'Road to Bangkok Pride 2566' campaign. This landmark event aims to celebrate diversity, foster equality, and establish Thailand as a premier LGBTQ+ tourism destination. Officers stopped a "suspicious" looking car with a Bangkok registration plate driven by Nateepat Kulsethasith, a party list member belonging to the MFP. Nateepat Kulsethasith (Kuhn Joy) is known to be a strong supporter of the LGBT and Thai Rainbow movements. Her MP's seat will now be taken over by another elected MFP member. Meanwhile Pita Limjaroenrat himself has come under severe criticism from his political rivals in the latest round of Thai social media demanding investigations into his commercial interests. What is to be the likely outcome of this sad state of affairs, and what will happen to the case for a new democratic ethos in the Kingdom of the City of Angels?

Keywords: Thailand, Pita Limjaroenrat, Corruption, Move Forward Party (MFP), King Rama X, RTAF, RTP, Systemic corruption, Buddhist Sangha, LGBT issues, Article 112 of Thailand's lèse-majesté

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1. Introduction

Thailand's long, rich and ancient culture is replete with ancient Sanskrit artefacts dating back over 700 years thereby making Siam and modern Thailand one of the oldest on-going monarchies in the world. Also, over 95% of Thai people are Buddhist while a small portion are Christian, animists and Muslims. This makes ancient Siamese culture and its modern Thai successor a history of slavery, monarchical absolutism and political violence. Most of the people lived in virtual slavery and under slave-like conditions. Most people

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lived in great fear and peril to their lives earning a fraction of what their modern successors do (Rappa, 2023). Only the *farang* and Siamese elites found themselves living in great luxury. The rise of fall of various ancient Siamese kingdoms—Lanna-Tai, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya—and the destruction of their two mortal enemies (i.e., Burma and the Khmer Kingdom) led to Siam's eventual great expansion by the time of Chulalongkorn the Great (Rama V). It was King Bhumiphon Adulyadej or Rama IX who led the greatest levels of political, social and economic progress over 70 years.

Today, under the reign of Rama X, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promotes the City of Angels and the land of smiling Thai people to untold ancient and modern pleasures. Unfortunately, there are also many scams by local Thai people and illegal acts by RTP and RTAF officers as well as Tourism Police officers, many of who are *farang* volunteers. The new Coalition under Pita Limjaroenrat will not inherit governing a kingdom that is monolithic. For example, in terms of its political economy, the top 0.5% of the population owns at least 93% of all the wealth. Of course technically, the King of Thailand owns all the land in the kingdom and those who dare challenge that premise face being charged under Article 112 of the Thai Penal Code.

In terms of wages, by the 1980s, a hamburger cost US\$1. By 1990, a cheese burger cost US\$2. In 1985, a foot massage for example cost 100 Thai baht and the real wages earned by a massage therapist in the best possible scenario including tips was 50-baht x 10 h @ 50 baht per h x 6 days a week for a total of 12,000 baht a month. A decade later in the 1990s, most Thai people lived on less than US\$1 a day or 30 baht. While the foot masseurs charged 200 baht for an hour; which rose to 300 baht by 2023. Many of the problems that Pita's new Coalition will face include systemic corruption. For example, in 2020, Schoeberlein mentioned the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) for Thailand as rising every year.

Systemic corruption is another pre-existing condition in Thailand today. Corruption among Siamese and Thai elites has existed for centuries. The important bloodless coup of 1932 failed to stop endemic corruption. Corruption has had a snowball effect on the modern Thai economy. Whether authoritarian or democratic, Thai governments have been proven to be historically corrupt. The Thai people view "politicians as more corrupt than bureaucrats. They believe corruption is getting worse, especially among politicians. Among public institutions, the police and MPs are rated as the least honest, followed by the Ministry of Interior, and Customs Department. Among public offices, the customs, police and land offices are ranked lowest for quality of service". In her major findings of her 2000 survey, "One tenth of households are solicited for bribes by some public office each year. The offices where visitors are most likely to be solicited for a bribe are land offices, customs, police and automobile licensing. The average bribe solicited is highest at the police, followed by customs, tax offices, and land offices. Three offices—land, police, and tax—account for 88% of the total value of bribes solicited. The average amount asked from each solicited household is just under ten thousand baht (US\$250). However, this is very unevenly spread. The vast majority of solicited households are asked for only small amounts under a thousand baht (US\$25)" (Phongpaichit *et al.*, 2000).

2. The May 14th General Election (GE)

The new Thai government since the May General Election (GE) resulted in an uneasy coalition of 58 different political parties with the exception of the military-backed Palang Pracharath Party and the United Nation Party (UNP) under former PM Chan-o-Cha. Chan-o-Cha resigned from the Palang Pracharath to join the UNP but failed to attract new voters from Gen Y and Gen Z as well as the youthful swing voters as predicted by Singapore political scientist Antonio L Rappa of the Singapore University of Social Sciences (CNA, 2566). However, the road to the PM's office has not been smooth for Pita Limjaroenrat. Thailand's prime ministerial frontrunner Pita Limjaroenrat will be investigated over whether he was qualified to run in last month's election, a top official said on Monday, in another setback as he battles to win backing for his premiership. The youthful-looking 42-year-old leader of the progressive Move Forward Party (MFP) won a landslide GE victory that completely stunned Thailand's military-backed regime. While some observers on social media have said that a coup by the incumbent PM Chan-o-Cha was a strong possibility, it appears that such a coup may not be necessary. This is because the Election Commission is investigating Kuhn Pita's fitness for the Thai Parliament. This is because of Kuhn Pita's ownership of shares in his family's media firm that is prohibited under Thai election laws. Kuhn Pita however has argued that his shares in ITV were transferred out and that the company was already defunct before the GE. If the Constitutional Court finds him guilty, he will face Parliamentary disqualification; lose his seat as an MP; may be jailed for up to 10 years; and, may be banned from politics for 20 years. Interestingly, this is the same tactic that the self-proclaimed PM Chan-o-Cha used against Thanathorn

Juangroongruangkit. The leader of the 2561 Future Forward Party (FFP) led by Thai billionaire Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit. Now they intend to use it against the potential PM-elect Pita Limjaroenrat ([Rappa, 2022](#)).

3. Background of the Young Democratic Leaders

Both men are not only young and in their 40s but also highly educated in the top Thai universities and the top foreign universities as well. They also have a wide and deep overlapping networks of experts, scholars, and supporters as seen in the landslide victory over the military-backed regime.

Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit (Kuhn Ekk) formed the FFP in 2551 with a Thammasat University professor named Piyabutr Saengkanokkul. The latter was the first and only Secretary-General of the FFP. Kuhn Ekk formed the FFP in 2551 and was immediately elected FFP leader. He is President and CEO of the Thai Summit Group taking over his father after the latter's death in 2545. He was educated at Thammasat University, Chulalongkorn University and New York University. He was charged under Article 112 of Thailand's *lèse-majesté* laws after he criticized the Prayut Chan-o-Cha government of mismanaging COVID-19. At one time, he was also the wealthiest MP in the Thai Parliament. Kuhn Ekk is married with four children.

Pita Limjaroenrat was educated in New Zealand, Harvard and MIT. He took over his family's agricultural business after his father's death. He was invited by Future Forward Party (FFP) leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit to stand in the 2552 Thai GE; and won a Party List seat. He would later lead a new coalition of Opposition parties; stand and win in the 2556 GE but then he would have to face the stupidity of the caretaker government led by Chan-o-Cha. Kuhn Pita was married to a famous Thai socialite but got divorced the following year due to allegations of spousal abuse. It is still rumoured that all she wanted was his fame and his money since he comes from a wealthy family and she does not. It is not known if Kuhn Pita has any children out of wedlock.

4. Analysis

How can there be a future for democracy in Thailand when over 52 million voters voted for MFP and 58 other political parties including Palang Pracharath and Pheu Thai only to discover that incumbent PM Chan-o-Cha is up to his old tricks again? ([Rappa, 2017](#)).

Both Pita Limjaroenrat (MFP, 2556) and his predecessor Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit (FFP, 2551) have strikingly similar political and civilian backgrounds. However, it is more widely known that Kuhn Pita is closer to the Shinawatra family as well as the several high-ranking members of the Pheu Thai party that is backed by Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra. The current MFP's coalition has secured 312 Seats in the House including MFP (151 Seats); Pheu Thai (141); Prachachart (not the same as Palang Pracharath) Thai Sang Thai (6); Pheu Thai Rumphalang (2); Fair Party; Thai Liberal; and Plung Sungkom Mai all with one Seat in the House each. The Election Commission of Thailand and Nikkei Asia Research reports that the current incumbent ruling coalition (not the Pita Limjaroenrat coalition) is made up of Bhumjaithai (71 Seats); Palang Pracharath (40); United Thai Nation or UTN (36) that was led by Chan-o-Cha, the old Democrat Party (formerly led by Abhisit) Chart Thai Pattana (10); and Chart Pattana Kla (2) plus four more single-seat parties total 500 altogether with a grand total of 684 Seats in the Lower House. The problem is that the MFP coalition that won the landslide victory on May 14th 2566 only garnered 312 Seats in the Lower House while the Chan-o-Cha coalition or caretaker government only got 184 Seats in the House. This means neither Coalition can form the new government. The so-called caretaker government of Chan-o-Cha remains reluctant to hand over political power. Even after the GE, in late May 2556, Chan-o-Cha lambasted Kuhn Pita's already elected Parliamentarians or "MPs'-elect" for requesting ministerial data to do their constituency and Parliamentary work. Also, the Senate was empowered under the 2550 Constitution to continue to remain in the Thai Parliament as well as continues to hold veto power over any new laws or Bills passed by the Lower House and the Upper House from 2550 onwards.

Another issue is that the Senate was appointed by Chan-o-Cha and his political cronies. At least half of the Senators are high-ranking military officers as well. In fact, there are palatial rumors that even Rama X dislikes the MFP and some analysts anticipate that Chan-o-Cha will remain in power as caretaker PM for some time longer. This situation will most likely lead to public protests at various places including the Victory Monument. Many millennial voters have already begun calling for the King to step down and for a Constitutional revision of the monarchy itself. One cannot rule out the serious possibility of Thailand eventually becoming a Republic. However, the King has two trump cards: his immense wealth and giving assent to the caretaker Chan-o-Cha

to lead a coup. Unless the Thai economy is disrupted, the possibility of a coup can be avoided as any bloodshed will result in a serious blowback onto the Palace and the caretaker government of Chan-o-Cha. It will not be surprising if Chan-o-Cha and his cronies make use of Article 112 of Thailand's *lèse-majesté* to lay various charges against the winning members of Parliament who are ready to step into office, including their leader charismatic leader Pita Limjaroenrat.

5. Conclusion

Under the pro-military 2551 Thai Constitution, the self-appointed PM Prayuth Chan-o-Cha remains the incumbent prime minister. He and his ministers have shown themselves to be reluctant to hand over political power to the MFP of Pita Limjaroenrat and his coalition of 58 Opposition political parties with the exception of the military-backed Palang Pracharath and the United Thai Nation party. Prayuth is clearly using his old tactic of manipulating the Electoral Commission and the Constitutional Court to prevent Pita Limjaroenrat from taking office as PM-elect. This was what he had done to Thanathorn (Kuhn Ekk) in addition to filing three separate *lèse-majesté* charges against him for simply criticizing Prayuth's mismanagement of Thailand's Covid-19 strategy and the corruption revolving round the use of a particular vaccine that Prayuth had invested money.

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