

# [***Thai ex-Prime Minister Thaksin, just freed from detention, may still face a royal defamation charge***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BC8-C3S1-DYMD-62J0-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

February 19, 2024 Monday 7:59 AM GMT

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**Section:** INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**Length:** 902 words

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**Dateline:** BANGKOK

**Body**

BANGKOK — Thai prosecutors said Monday that further investigation is needed to decide whether to bring former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to trial for defaming the monarchy, just a day after he was freed from a prison sentence on other charges he was serving in a hospital.

Thaksin was released on parole Sunday from the hospital in Bangkok where he spent six months serving time for corruption-related offenses. He had been in self-imposed exile since 2008, but returned to Thailand in August last year to begin serving an eight-year sentence.

On his return, he was moved almost immediately from prison to the hospital on grounds of ill health, and about a week after that King Maha Vajiralongkorn reduced his sentence to a single year. Thaksin was granted parole earlier this month because of his age — he is 74 — and ill health, leaving him free for the remainder of his one-year sentence.

Thaksin was briefly detained Sunday by police from the Technology Crime Suppression Division as he left Bangkok’s Police General Hospital but was allowed temporary release to return home as it was not a working day for the prosecutor’s office, Prayuth Bejraguna, a spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, said at a news conference on Monday.

The attorney general’s office had announced earlier this month it had revived an investigation into whether Thaksin almost nine years ago violated the law against defaming the monarch, a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Thaksin was originally charged in 2016 with violating the law for remarks he made to journalists when he was in Seoul, South Korea, a year before that, but the investigation could proceed only after he was presented with the charge in person in the hospital last month, officials said.

Prayuth said Thaksin reported to the attorney general’s office on Monday for the charge, also known as lese majeste, and he was granted release on bail by posting a 500,000 baht ($13,900) bond without conditions beyond those of his parole. The conditions include travel restrictions and reporting himself every month for the remainder of his sentence.

Prayuth said the attorney general has taken into consideration Thaksin’s statement in his own defense and decided to order a further investigation of his case. He was ordered to return to the office on April 10.

Thaksin became prime minister in 2001 after using his telecommunications fortune to build his own political party and promoting populist policies. He was easily reelected in 2005, but ousted by a 2006 military coup after being accused of corruption, abuse of power and disrespect for the monarchy.

His popularity and unprecedented electoral support unnerved Thailand’s traditional ruling class, including monarchists and the military, and his ouster set off years of sometimes-violent confrontations between his supporters and opponents. Political parties with his backing continued to win elections but were forced from power several times by the courts and the army, both bulwarks of royalism.

Thaksin’s return to Thailand last year came the same day that the Pheu Thai party — the latest incarnation of the party he originally led to power in 2001, and for which he is considered the de facto leader — won a parliamentary vote to form a new government.

Thaksin’s critics have questioned whether his move from prison to more congenial conditions in the hospital reflected special privilege as part of a political deal between his supporters and opponents.

His release appeared to reflect a reconciliation with his enemies in Thailand’s conservative elite, who had believed his brash populist ***politics*** and electoral popularity posed a threat to the monarchy, which they consider the linchpin of Thai society.

Parties supported by Thaksin continued to reign at the polls after his ouster. However, last year, Pheu Thai managed just a close second-place election finish to the more progressive Move Forward party, whose proposals for reform of the army and the monarchy alarmed the royalist conservative establishment more than Pheu Thai, which had softened its anti-military line and was anxious to get back into power.

Move Forward was blocked from taking power when the members of the military-appointed Senate refused to approve its candidate for prime minister. Pheu Thai then put together a governing coalition including conservative parties that was acceptable to the Senate and formed the current government.

“In one sense, Thaksin going home to his family is an end to a personal and political journey that began with the 2006 coup when Thailand’s most popular prime minister was ousted,” Kevin Hewison, a professor emeritus at the University of North Carolina and a veteran Thai studies scholar, said to The Associated Press. “It is the delayed end to a period of political turmoil that brought the monarchy back to the center of the country’s ***politics***, with Thaksin then cast by his opponents as a threat to the monarchy.”

“Thailand’s ***politics*** is highly personalized, and Thaksin alienated many when in power. This residual hatred and mistrust is likely behind such moves against Thaksin,” said Hewison. “With so much wheeling and dealing already, a few Thaksin haters are unlikely to undo the grand conservative pact.”

It is also possible, he speculated, that the charge can be left pending as a threat to keep Thaksin in line, in case his political activities are seen as unacceptable.

**Load-Date:** February 19, 2024

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