

# [***Former Thai leader Thaksin makes first public appearances after release from detention***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJC-5R41-JC5B-G2YM-00000-00&context=1516831)

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BANGKOK — Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra began his first public appearances since leaving detention, with an early morning visit to a shrine in Bangkok on Thursday before flying to his home province of Chiang Mai in the country’s north.

[*The controversial billionaire,*](https://apnews.com/article/thaksin-thailand-explainer-3917d6cc84ab461ec25b8c50939bc5d3) a longtime rival of the country's conservative elite who was toppled in a coup in 2006 but remains influential in ***politics***, arrived before dawn at the capital's City Pillar, accompanied by his youngest [*daughter Paetongtarn*](https://apnews.com/article/thaksin-shinawatra-paetongtarn-pheu-thai-party-leader-86a706a96f88f7408e2fe11c0947ee66), the leader of governing Pheu Thai party.

Thaksin spent years in exile to avoid a jail term for corruption, a charge he always denied, but [*returned to Thailand as his allies in parliament formed a coalition government*](https://apnews.com/video/thailand-thailand-government-protests-and-demonstrations-coups-detat-thitinan-pongsudhirak-ac812221f18b43df85c7b37f64b743db) with military parties associated with the coups that repeatedly drove him and his allies out of power.

He was immediately sent to prison but within hours was moved to a city center hospital after he was diagnosed as being seriously ill. Soon afterwards, his eight-year sentence was commuted to one year. He was [*released on parole last month*](https://apnews.com/article/thailand-prime-minister-thaksin-parole-released-5a70a3401fcb17a7fe8dd2f5378c3e61) and left the hospital after six months without having spent a single night behind bars.

This lenient approach provoked [*claims of preferential treatment*](https://apnews.com/article/thailand-thaksin-politics-prison-hospital-inmate-6abb082baa6781403318bf739204cd9c). It was widely speculated he benefited from a political deal struck with his former enemies in the military and conservative royalist establishment to block the progressive Move Forward Party from forming a government following last year’s general election.

His appearances Thursday were his first in public since leaving hospital.

On Thursday morning, 74-year-old Thaksin wore a neck brace but otherwise appeared to move easily as he lit candles and sat to pray. He made no comment to the media gathered outside the city shrine's gates. He's announced a busy schedule of public appearances during his return to Chiang Mai, where Pheu Thai lost seats to rival Move Forward last year.

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