

# [***Thailand sentences man to record 50 years in prison for insulting the monarchy***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B4M-R201-DY7V-G01K-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; A Thai appeal court on Thursday extended a man's prison sentence to a record 50 years for insulting the monarchy, in what is believed to be the toughest penalty ever imposed under the country's draconian [*lese majeste*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/20/asia/thailand-lese-majeste-explainer/index.html) law, according to a legal rights group.

Mongkol Thirakhot, 30, an online clothes vendor and political activist from northern Chiang Rai province, was originally sentenced in 2023 to 28 years in prison for social media posts deemed damaging to the king.

On Thursday, the court of appeal in Chiang Rai found Mongkol guilty of about a dozen more violations of the royal insult law and added 22 years to his sentence, Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) said in a statement.

[*Thailand*](https://www.cnn.com/world/asia/thailand) has some of the world's strictest lese majeste laws, and criticizing the king, queen, or heir apparent can lead to a maximum 15-year prison sentence for each offense - which makes even talking about the royal family [*fraught with risk*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/19/asia/thailand-king-son-lese-majeste-exhibit-intl-hnk/index.html).

Sentences for those convicted under Section 112 of Thailand's Criminal Code, or lese majeste law, can be decades long and hundreds of people have been [*prosecuted in recent years*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/14/asia/thailand-lese-majeste-rukchanok-srinok-intl-hnk/index.html).

Mongkol, also known as "Busbas," was arrested in April 2021 over 27 posts he made on Facebook during March and April that year. A criminal court found him guilty of 14 violations of lese majeste and sentenced him in January 2023 to 28 years.

It is not clear what the content of the posts contained.

The appeal court on Thursday not only upheld Mongkol's earlier conviction but in addition found him guilty in 11 of the 13 cases that the lower court had earlier dismissed, and so imposed the longer sentence, TLHR said.

The court told Mongkol his sentence had been reduced by a third due to his cooperation during proceedings.

The Supreme Court denied Mongkol's bail request but TLHR said he plans to appeal the verdict.

"The record-breaking 50-year prison sentence imposed on (Mongkol) for his Facebook posts makes it undeniable that Thailand's anachronistic lese-majeste law is in dire need of reforms," said Akarachai Chaimaneekarakate, advocacy lead at TLHR.

Akarachai said "it is a wake up-call" to the government to "amend the law and bring it in line with international standards."

"Thailand cannot expect to become a member of the UN Human Rights Council later this year if it refuses to address the elephant in the room," he said.

Draconian law

The previous record jail time for a lese majeste conviction was in 2021 when [*Anchan Preelert*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/20/asia/thailand-lese-majeste-anchan-sentence-intl-hnk/index.html), 65, was sentenced to 43 years for sharing audio clips on YouTube and Facebook between 2014 and 2015 that were deemed critical of the kingdom's royal family. The court initially handed Anchan a sentence of 87 years but halved it because of her guilty plea.

For years, [*human rights organizations*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/02/thailand-un-experts-alarmed-rise-use-lese-majeste-laws) and free speech campaigners have said lese majeste has been used as a [*political tool*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/17/asia/thailand-democracy-protests-monarchy-intl-hnk/index.html) to silence critics of the Thai government.

Anyone - ordinary citizens as well as the government - can bring lese majeste charges on behalf of the king, even if they are not directly involved with the case.

But rights groups say the right to freedom of expression in Thailand has come under increased attack since 2020, when youth-led protests erupted across the country demanding constitutional and democratic reforms that included reducing the military's power and influence in ***politics*** and reforms to the powerful monarchy.

TLHR said that since the start of those protests in July 2020, at least 1,938 people have been prosecuted for their participation in political assemblies and for speaking out, with 286 of those cases involving children.

At least 262 people have been charged with lese majeste during that time, the group added.

Among the most high-profile cases is prominent activist and lawyer Arnon Nampa, who in September was sentenced to four years in prison on lese majeste charges for a speech he delivered in October 2020. Arnon was one of the first activists to publicly call for reform of the monarchy during the protests.

Earlier this week, the criminal court sentenced Arnon to another four years in prison for three Facebook posts "criticizing the use of Section 112 and the monarchy's budget," TLRH said.

Thailand's lese majeste prosecutions continue despite a civilian government now being in power, following almost a decade of military-backed rule.

Later this month, former Move Forward Party leader[*Pita Limjaroenrat*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/15/asia/thailand-opposition-parties-military-election-analysis-intl-hnk/index.html) faces two verdicts that could see him banned from ***politics*** and the party dissolved.

The progressive party won the most votes in last year's general election but was [*prevented from forming a government*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/23/asia/thailand-explainer-election-prime-minister-intl-hnk/index.html) as it failed to win support from parliamentarians over its royal reform agenda.

The verdicts include a decision by the Constitutional Court on whether Pita sought to overthrow the monarchy through his election campaign to amend the lese majeste law.

Another verdict will decide whether he violated election laws by running for office while holding shares in a media company - a claim he denies.

By Helen Regan, CNN

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