

# [***Progressive Thai lawmaker sentenced to six years for insulting the monarchy***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69VY-Y301-JBSS-S45J-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; A progressive Thai lawmaker was sentenced to six years in prison Wednesday on charges of insulting the monarchy and other related offenses over two social media posts, according to the advocacy group Thai Lawyers for Human Rights.

Rukchanok Srinok, 29, a lawmaker with the opposition Move Forward Party, was found guilty of lese majeste and breaching the Computer Crimes Act by Thailand's Criminal Court for two posts made on the social media platform X in 2020.

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.

Sentences for those convicted under Article 112 of Thailand's Criminal Code can be decades long and hundreds of people have been prosecuted in recent years.

One post included criticism of the government's Covid-19 vaccine procurement which included a pharmaceutical company linked to the king, TLHR said. Another was a retweet of a photo from a 2020 protest that contained messages deemed by the court to be anti-monarchy, said TLHR, which is monitoring her case.

Rukchanok, also known as "Ice," was granted bail while she appeals the sentence, according to TLHR. After leaving court, she posted a message on her Facebook page saying she was back at work in parliament and that she would "like to be the voice for all 112 defendants to be granted bail."

Before entering ***politics*** in 2023, Rukchanok rose to prominence as an activist and outspoken critic of the former government of Prayut Chan-o-cha, an ex-general who seized power in a coup in 2014.

Her party Move Forward won the most votes in Thailand's May election but was prevented from forming a government by the country's powerful conservative establishment over the party's bid to reform the lese majeste laws.

In recent years, young people have been leading widespread calls for deep changes to how Thailand is run.

Youth-led protests erupted across Thailand in 2020 demanding constitutional and democratic reforms that included reducing the military's power and influence in ***politics*** and reforms to the powerful monarchy.

Once a taboo subject, the issue of royal reform and amendments to lese majeste has seen a turning point since those protests, [*with people increasingly speaking*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/11/asia/thailand-election-move-forward-youth-intl-hnk/index.html) about the monarchy openly and publicly, despite the legal risks.

Rukchanok is one of hundreds of people, including young student activists and lawmakers, prosecuted with lese majeste since those protests.

Human rights groups say the right to freedom of expression in Thailand has come under attack since 2020.

TLHR said that since the start of the protests in July 2020, at least 1,930 people have been politically prosecuted their participation in political assemblies and for speaking out, with 216 of those cases involving children.

At least 259 people have been charged with lese majeste during that time, the group added.

In September, prominent Thai activist and lawyer Arnon Nampa was sentenced to four years in prison on lese majeste charges for a speech he delivered in October 2020. Nampa was one of the first activists to publicly call for reform of the monarchy during the protests.

"The prosecution of an opposition member of parliament for two tweets is not only an appalling violation of free expression, but sends a chilling message to other outspoken opposition party members to keep silent," Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

"The Thai authorities should quash this sentence, and cease prosecuting other cases under the lese majeste law."

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 and other laws such as the Computer Crimes Act and sedition have 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.

Those who have fallen foul of the law in the past include one man accused of "liking" a Facebook page deemed insulting to the late King Bhumibol and posting a sarcastic photo of his pet dog.

In 2021, [*a Thai woman was handed a 43-year jail sentence*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/20/asia/thailand-lese-majeste-anchan-sentence-intl-hnk), believed to be the toughest ever imposed, after pleading guilty to sharing audio clips on YouTube and Facebook that were deemed critical of the royal family.

By Helen Regan, CNN

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