

Thailand: Commentary - Does Thaksin want revenge?

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Body

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It started out as mere gossip that **not** many people thought would become true.

"Khunying Or (Pojaman Shinawatra) wants it, and it seems she's definitely going to get it," a senior colleague of mine told everyone he talked to. "What a shame. They don't even care that the law prescribes prison for this kind of deal."

That was about five years ago. The planned bidding for the Ratchadapisek land plot was only mentioned in whispered **dismay** within limited circles. The Manager was still defending, if **not** admiring, virtually everything the Thaksin administration did. The new political empire was going strong, backed by an unprecedented democratic mandate, an unrivalled war chest and formidable PR machinery. Friends could still toast ideological differences, and people wearing yellow and red could share the same table. Angkhana Radabpanyawoot was enjoying life at university and may **not** have known what activism really meant.

Would Thailand have been different today had the Shinawatra couple fought off the urge to add the prime property area to their already enormous wealth? Nobody knows for sure and only this much is certain: we can't ask this question anywhere at present without further polluting the bad blood between Thai people. Dazed, lost and badly divided, we as a nation acknowledged on October 21's court ruling impassively, having no idea how to move on from here.

So many lines have been crossed. It's safe to say that the Shinawatras did it first. The blatant purchase of the Ratchadapisek land followed some, and led to more, provocative use of state power. It is worth noting that the initial outcry was perfectly within the bounds of democratic principles, before the system's failures to tackle simple legal and moral questions sent the protests spiralling out of control. If the Shinawatras lowered the bar on what politicians can do when they enjoyed a vast popular mandate, the People's Alliance for Democracy has set a new benchmark on what can be done to get elected officials out of power if they are stubbornly corrupt.

So, it's **not surprising** that many **Thais greeted** on October 21's guilty verdict against Thaksin Shinawatra with only a slight shrug. A very simple legal question that should have been dealt with five years ago has become mired with political, moral and ideological implications, so much so that we barely remember its original essence.

The guilty ruling may generate great political repercussions. Thaksin will now be condemned to play politics in the shadows for at least a decade, unless an explosive constitutional pardon is achieved - which is now nearly impossible. The Somchai government will come under renewed pressure to get his extradition, while the UK faces the unenviable task of deciding if the verdict is legal or political. Now that the justice system is seemingly functioning, what will the PAD do next?

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Morally or ethically, the verdict will do little to bridge the ideological polarity that has an abyss to anarchy sitting in the middle. The country can't even agree on whether Angkhana's brutal death on October 7 was a big price for the failure to handle the likes of the Ratchadapisek land case timely, or a result of jealous elements exploiting some minor "everybody-else-does-it" mistakes.

The strongest evidence that we remain at square one has come from London. Thaksin was quoted on October 21 as describing the verdict as politically motivated. What a cruel deadlock he's given to his country. When he was in power, legal **actions** against a myriad of corruption or conflict-of-interest cases were pre-empted. After he was ousted, all cases were a "conspiracy" against him.

In an ideal world five years ago, Thaksin Shinawatra could have told his wife: "Let's wait and buy some other less contentious plots. We are rich enough to buy any property we want after I leave office." The same man could have dropped the controversial loan plan for Burma, allowed a national telecom commission to be set up to decide telecom concession conversion schemes, and sold Shin Corp in a transparent manner.

Thaksin probably is **not** to be solely blamed for the great misery and tragedy that has befallen Thailand ever since, but at least we expected him to emerge on October 21 and say he was sorry, that he broke the law and he regretted it - as well as its sad consequences. He will **not** be doing that. Gossip being passed around in limited circles now has it that he wants revenge, and he will most likely do anything he can to get it, no matter how great the stakes are. What a shame.

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